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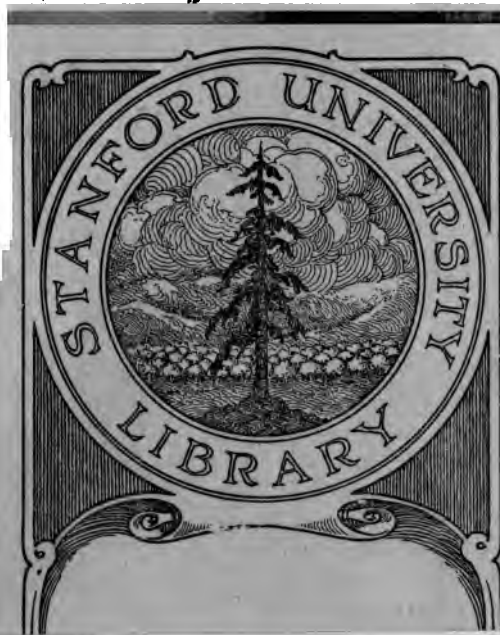
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ES



FOUR PLAYS

By ÉMILE AUGIER

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION
By BARRETT H CLARK
WITH A PREFACE BY BRIEUX



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To J. RALPH BENZIES

This volume is affectionately dedicated.

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PREFACE

MY DEAR MR. CLARK:

AS I had occasion to explain to you when you were planning the present volume, I can see among the numerous reasons for the success which it will achieve that it is above all a timely book, introducing as it does the work of Emile Augier to the American public at the moment when the evolution of the taste of that public is directing it precisely toward that form of dramatic art which is exemplified by the author of "Le Gendre de M. Poirier." No longer content merely with dramas of adventure and plays in which sensational incidents and arbitrary development render them closely akin to the newspaper serial or the fairy-tale, this public has ceased looking to the theatre *solely* as an amusement, a pleasant recreation and distraction from its daily occupations; it is now interested in more complex problems; it is willing to listen to arguments — a process more taxing, possibly, than the other, but thereby only the more fascinating. Avid of progress and bent on the quest of the most recent and most profound manifestations of thought, it cannot fail at this time to take an interest in the theatre of ideas. Indeed, if the drama of Ibsen has already attracted the attention of this public, it is certain that there has existed some transitional form of dramatic art between that drama and the works first presented in America.

Each epoch has its particular way of thinking and its particular kind of plays. Our epoch is that of the social play.

The material progress of civilization, reducing the distance and obstacles which hitherto separated the nations, has resulted in bringing us closer to one another, arousing our common interests and stimulating those mental and spiritual qualities

which unite the Old World with the New. This art in my opinion is only the result of that sympathetic note which we seek in those who not many years ago were total strangers to us.

You have made a most wise and careful choice among the works of Emile Augier.

"Le Gendre de M. Poirier," his most celebrated comedy, together with "Les Fourchambault" and "Le Mariage d'Olympe," set forth and defend principles and ideas which cannot but find favour in the United States.

This play ["Le Gendre de M. Poirier"] may be compared with an exciting and chivalrous tournament, in which the contestants represent the two forms of nobility: that of the heart or spirit, nobility pure and simple, and that of caste. The first triumphs over the other, yet without crushing it—as is just and fitting. Antoinette Poirier, having succeeded in arousing the enthusiasm and admiration of her husband the Marquis de Presles to the point where he renders her the highest possible homage—he acknowledges that in her heart he has found that of his mother the Marquise—exclaims, wounded and yet radiantly happy in the full consciousness of her legitimate pride: "I have my mother's heart!"

This play then sums up in these two speeches—one uttered by the representative of individual pride, the other by the representative of traditional haughtiness, which may occasionally hide but never destroy, the essential qualities of the aristocracy.

Here is depicted that struggle, intelligent, courteous, tender, too, between race and caste, with honor in the balance. In short, here we are able to observe commonsense, sentiment, and French good-humour finally at swords' points with traditional pride and all its concomitant sophistry, achieving a triumph, a triumph however over what is conventional and superficial in this ancient pride, for it respects and honours the prestige and greatness of the past and even admits the charm of aristocratic idiosyncrasies.

Finally, as a sort of compensation due us for the exaggerations of the Naturalistic School, there is not a single odious

personage in this lively and natural comedy, for Madame de Montjay is only a dramatic "utility," which Augier took pleasure in relegating far into the background.

As for the Marquis de Presles, he is exquisitely French, and his purely superficial faults scarcely detract from his charm in the eyes of the Poirier-Verdelet partnership. Nor do the petty meannesses of these old gentlemen greatly lower them in our eyes — what a good excuse they have! After this optimistic and charming play it was necessary to select one showing Emile Augier under his severest aspect. You have done this in choosing "Le Mariage d'Olympe."

Emile Augier has always stood for the great middle classes. Its ideals are order and regularity, justice, the family and fire-side. He considers from a tragic viewpoint what Molière laughed at in order not to cry over, and he stands forth as champion against every peril which threatens to destroy conjugal happiness.

His middle-class honesty prevented his sentimentalising over the lot of the prostitute; throughout his plays he shows himself her constant enemy. His Olympe is the exact counterpart of Marguerite Gautier in "La Dame aux camélias": she is a cynical and insidious being, whom unhoped-for good fortune has not succeeded in overthrowing.

Having made her way by subterfuge into society and the intimacy of the family circle, she does not seek real redemption. Seized with a homesickness for her vile past, she makes use of her position only in order to wreck the happiness of those about her, up to the day when the gentleman of the old school, whose nephew she has ensnared and married, puts an end to her in an access of indignation.

In "Les Fourchambault" we observe the struggle between ambition and the material interests on the one hand, and natural impulse and the true nobility of the heart on the other. In every scene Emile Augier maintains his antipathy to fortunes which, when they are not honourably acquired, are the brutal weapons directed against those who are weaker, or else when they are

utilised for ends to which our reason, our commonsense and our desire for justice, are radically opposed.

The sordid, petty, and ambitious Madame Fourchambault, Fourchambault, Bernard and his mother, are synthetic figures, types of humanity at large, thrust into the midst of social drama.

Emile Augier was great as an observer of the society of his time. Weary of the conventional, romantic, superannuated drama of his day, of religious and historical themes, he preferred to treat those questions which the life of his time furnishes every day to the dramatist.

The powers of good and evil have since Augier's day changed in the matter of terminology, together with the methods of treating them as material for drama. He was among the first to realise that an individual face to face with questions of physiological and social heredity was quite as poignant a subject for study as was the legendary hero pursued by the *anañkê* of antiquity; so that the plays of the present are more attractive to us than those of early times by reason of the interest aroused by the discussions to which they give rise, discussions which we can immediately assimilate and allow to react upon our consciousness as living beings.

Such then are the questions treated in the plays of Emile Augier which this volume offers to the American public. I am delighted, Monsieur, to join you in rendering homage to the literary memory of a master whom I consider one of the greatest of that line in which I am proud and happy to consider myself as a dramatist and French writer.

Yours, etc.,

BRIEUX.

INTRODUCTION

EMILE AUGIER

THE present volume is the first attempt to make known in English something of the rich and varied genius of one of the ablest and most influential dramatists of the nineteenth century. Up to the present, Emile Augier has been accessible to readers of English only through translations of two plays, while among the rare studies of the subject in our language the only one that pretends to any sort of completeness is the illuminating and sympathetic essay by Professor Brander Matthews in his "French Dramatists of the Nineteenth Century."

The first three plays, here translated for the first time, are typical of three separate and distinct manners of their author; the fourth is a delicate and amusing trifle, serving to show rather what he could do in an odd moment than to stand for a different phase of his work. One of these is an acknowledged masterpiece of the nineteenth century drama: "Le Gendre de M. Poirier" is indubitably one of the finest comedies since Molière, and rightly holds a place of honour in the repertory of the Comédie Française with "Tartufe" and "Le Mariage de Figaro." "Les Fourchambault," too, with its plea for family solidarity, its commonsense, its quiet and reasoned optimism, is still deservedly a favourite in France. "Le Mariage d'Olympe" is not often played, but its position in French drama, its historical importance, its significance as a social document, containing as it does a challenge to romantic ideas about the "rehabilitation of the courtesan," entitle it to a position of high honour.

A volume which aimed at including all the important and typical plays of Augier would be three or four times the size of

the present, which seeks only to introduce three of the best of his plays.

There is so much matter in the dramatic works of Augier which does not properly fall within the scope of the theatre, that the casual reader may infer, incorrectly, that Augier was more of a social reformer and champion of home and fatherland, than a man of the theatre. True it is that in practically all his plays he attacks some form of social or political corruption, and stands forth to do battle in behalf of the domestic virtues. He condemns political trickery, he aims his shafts at the prostitute regaled as a wife and mother, trying to break her way into the homes and families of the respectable; he ruthlessly flays all forms of marital infidelity, and fearlessly enters the arena in questions of divorce and marriage — but with all this, he is primarily a dramatist. His works are plays, as time has proved. Augier does not however take a subject at hazard, as Pinero often does, and then write a play; nor does he, as is usual with his disciple Brieux, write his play to fit a thesis: his themes evolve naturally out of the fable, with the apparent unconsciousness of art. He is deeply concerned with the vices and virtues of mankind, but rarely does he allow his convictions to warp the dramatic texture of his plays. Rarely, too, is he so fearlessly didactic as his fellow-playwright Dumas fils. Augier has been compared with Molière; but it is only as a man of the theatre and a painter of character that the analogy holds.

Augier's début was made with a graceful comedy in two acts: "*La Cigüe*" (1844). This is in verse, and recounts the story of a repentant debauchee. His next play, "*Un Homme de bien*" (1845), likewise in verse, in spite of its hesitancy in the development of plot and the delineation of character, indicates the path which Augier was to tread; here he "manifests for the first time his intention to paint a picture of contemporary life, attack the customs of the day, in short, to write a social comedy."¹

But Augier did not at once adopt and develop his new

¹ Henry Gaillard de Champriis; "*Emile Augier et la Comédie sociale*" (Grasset, Paris, 1910).

manner. During the next few years, he continued to write verse plays in which the thesis was more or less prominent.

"L'Aventurière" (1848), "Gabrielle" (1849), "Le Joueur de Flute" (1850), "Diane" (1852), "Philiberte" (1853), and "Paul Forestier" (1868) are primarily comedies in which the purely dramatic element predominates, although "L'Aventurière" and "Gabrielle" are a closer approximation to the later manner than the others.

"L'Aventurière" is a modern play in spite of the fact that the scene is laid in the Italian Renaissance. It is the story of an adventuress who has managed to get into the good graces of a rich merchant of Padua. He is about to give up friends and family for the woman, when his son, who has been away for ten years, appears upon the scene. Assuming a disguise, he reveals the true character of Clorinde to his father and effects a breaking-off of their relationship. The father and family are saved and the repentant woman goes into a convent.

If in "L'Aventurière" Augier was still undecided as to the means of expression best fitted to his temperament or as to the purpose to which his powers were to be put, in "Le Mariage d'Olympe," six years later, he found his most forceful and realistic manner. Meantime there is one play, forming a connecting link between the wavering "Adventurière" and "Olympe." "Gabrielle" (1849) is, in spite of its poetic form, a realistic play. The husband who labours hard for wife and family, the wife who is bored and seeks a fuller "realisation of self" in the husband's friend — this is a familiar situation. But it should be borne in mind that a serious treatment of such a story was, sixty-five years ago, something of a departure. Scribe's stock in trade was the *ménage à trois*, but conjugal infidelity with him was always a subject for comedy. Augier's play then was a challenge, both to the Romanticists and the Vaudevillistes. When Julien Chabrière opens the eyes of his wife and her would-be lover to the dangers and miseries of their projected step, the lover goes away and Gabrielle, falling to her knees before her husband, speaks the celebrated line:

"O père de famille! O poète, je t'aime!"

Leaving the realm of poetic comedy, with its attached "moral" and more or less optimistic *dénouement*, in 1854 Augier threw the gauntlet in the face of the Romanticists who applauded Dumas fils' "*La Dame aux camélias*" — commonly known in English as "*Camille*." A curious change in public taste and manners had allowed large numbers of demi-mondaines to assume a place of distinction and honour in the social life of the day. This was due perhaps to the numerous political transformations which France was at the time undergoing, as well as the spreading of the ideas of the Romantic school of art and literature. When, in 1852, Dumas fils made a prostitute the sympathetic heroine of a play, and brought forward the doctrine that "she will be forgiven because she has loved deeply," a feeling of revolt awoke in the breast of Augier, and he wrote "*Le Mariage d'Olympe*." This is one of the most directly didactic of all his works: it was aimed primarily against the "reign of the courtesan." He says, in short, that such women as Olympe Taverny do undoubtedly exist, that the men are at fault as much as the women for that fact; possibly he even secretly sympathises with her, but he denies her the right to marry into good families. When the Marquis de Puygiron shoots Olympe, after endeavouring to force her to give up the family name which she has stolen, declaring that "God is his judge," Augier issues his ultimatum on the question.

"*Le Mariage d'Olympe*," a play with a purpose, stands apart from the great mass of Augier's plays. In the three short and well built acts, the author has merely sketched his characters: every effort has been bent on the idea, the facts, the thesis. Just so much of characterisation as is needed to carry the story is given. The admirable and disgusting scene which closes the second act is one of the most trenchant and poignant which ever came from this dramatist's pen. Nowadays, even after Zola and Becque and the Théâtre Libre dramatists, it strikes a note of horror. How it must have shocked an audience of the 'fifties!

Although the play failed ¹ it aroused considerable discussion and a good deal of adverse criticism. Still, its importance in the dramatic and intellectual development of the dramatist was great. It was his first straightforward declaration of independence. From 1854 on, he followed the path he had himself opened with this early play.

"The reign of the courtesan" was not ended by the plays of the day, but Augier did not cease for that reason in his attempts to check its influence. Twelve years after "*Le Mariage d'Olympe*" he wrote "*La Contagion*." The development of society and its relation to the fallen woman may be clearly traced by a comparative study of "*L'Aventurière*," "*Le Mariage d'Olympe*," and "*La Contagion*." In the first play, the woman is merely an exception, an adventuress who happens to "break into" society and a good family. In "*Le Mariage d'Olympe*" she is a demi-mondaine who has carefully planned to obtain for herself, at any cost, a noble name. But she is checked in time — by a pistol-shot. Twelve years later the Olympes and Clorindes are no longer exceptions; the rehabilitated courtesan has triumphed. By skillful manipulation she has insinuated her way into a position of equality similar to that of the respected mother and wife, and has even begun to corrupt her. "The consequences" [of this triumph of the courtesan] says De Champris, "were deplorable. As a result of hearing of these 'ladies,' of reading about them in the newspapers, of seeing their gorgeous equipages, of passing their pretty homes, applauding them on the stage or admiring their silhouettes in the fashion magazines, society women fell a prey to contradictory feelings and ideas: the resentment at being occasionally deserted for these women, the curiosity to know these enemies, so far away yet so near, the wish to rival them, furnished them with weapons, perhaps even a certain desire for forbidden fruit, and gave birth to a regret at being forced to pay for a reputation in society which entailed so

¹ Due perhaps to the fact that the public had had enough of the subject: "*La Dame aux camélias*," "*Les Filles de marbre*," and "*Le Demi-monde*," all treated a similar theme.

rigid a restraint. For these various reasons, many honest women played the part of demi-mondaines." This was the contagion against which Augier raised his voice. The clever and diabolical Navarette, mistress of a wealthy man of the world, succeeds in ruining her lover and bringing his family to her feet. By subtle manipulation she compromises the Baron d'Estrigaud's married sister, is witness of her infidelity, and finally succeeds in holding the entire family at her mercy. A pistol-shot will do no good here: the evil has gone too far, society itself is corrupted. The kept woman, successfully rehabilitated, rich, held in high esteem, has at last attained that position for which she had striven.

The war of 1870 and the fall of the Empire put a stop to the particular state of affairs which Augier had fought against. Rarely in his later plays (except in "*Jean de Thommeray*") did he again attack the question. To Brieux and Hervieu and François de Curel he left the work of analysing deeper motives and making a study of the various ramifications, some of which were still invisible in Augier's day — but this is current history.

The three plays which have just been discussed are sufficient to show that Augier is the staunch champion of the family and the home. His hatred of the prostitute is not so much a matter of personal feeling as a social one. Whether or no he believes in what is now known as segregated vice or whether as a man he was occasionally lenient in matters of sex, is beside the question: he saw that the home, of all institutions in France the most important, was threatened by a fearful invasion, and he did his best to check it.

It will be seen that Augier's plays, so far considered, are not in chronological order. "*L'Aventurière*," "*Le Mariage d'Olympe*," and "*La Contagion*," have been grouped together for the purpose of observing a particular trend in the thought of the author. Meantime, such widely different plays as "*Philiberte*," "*La Pierre de touche*," "*Le Gendre de M. Poirier*," and "*Les Effrontés*," made their appearance.

"*Gabrielle*" was the first play to treat of a more insidious

evil, a greater danger to the home which Augier was ever so eager to protect: conjugal infidelity. After the comparatively timid "*Gabrielle*" came "*Les Lionnes pauvres*" (1858), which stands in much the same relation to the earlier play as "*Le Mariage d'Olympe*" did to "*L'Aventurière*." Here again is the story of a woman whom the love of luxury, too much idleness and a natural penchant, lead to take a lover. The honest and industrious husband is long kept in ignorance of the fact, believing that his wife's expensive clothes are paid for out of her savings. Besides being deceived, in the French sense of the word, he is being partially supported meantime by his wife's lover. At last he learns the facts, and is even willing to forgive his wife, but when she declares her unwillingness to restore the money given her, on the ground that she is "afraid of poverty," the husband leaves her. He seeks consolation in the home of Thérèse and Léon Lecarmier. Then Thérèse is forced to tell him that her husband, Léon, is Séraphine's lover. Séraphine, then going the path of least resistance, decides to remain a kept woman. Thenceforth she joins the ranks of Olympe and Navarette.

Augier's sanity, his healthy attitude toward humanity, his belief in the eternal rightness of things, could not long remain obscured by the temporary pessimism incident to the writing of "*Les Lionnes pauvres*." In 1858, the same year, he turned to light comedy, and in "*La Jeunesse*" produced a genial if somewhat conventional play. In spite of its thesis—that money is an evil, especially in the case where young people are forced into marriages of convenience—it can scarcely be classed among the important social plays. It marks a return to the earlier manner.

The question of money, lightly touched upon in "*La Jeunesse*," is the second of the important problems which is intimately concerned with the welfare of the family and the home. From this time on, sex and money are to assume a position in the front rank of Augier's work.

Closely allied in spirit with "*La Jeunesse*" is "*Un beau Mariage*" (1859). The question, Should a poor man marry a rich wife, is handled with keen insight and answered in the

negative. Pierre Chambaud, a poor young chemist, marries the rich Clémentine Bernier, whose mother, possessing nearly all the money, literally supports the daughter and her husband. Pierre soon becomes a mere figure-head in his own house and, as a result of the social ambitions of his wife and mother-in-law, is forced to give up his scientific pursuits. Soon losing the love and respect of the two women, he complains to them, and is made to feel more keenly than ever the utter degradation of his position. A certain Marquis de la Roche-Pingolley has been over-assiduous in his attentions to Pierre's mother-in-law. When he demands that the Marquis either marry Madame Bernier or cease his visits, he is humiliated once again by being told by his mother-in-law that the Marquis is in *her* home. Receiving no help or sympathy from his wife, he goes to live with his friend, Michel Ducaïne, and work out an experiment which, if successful, will revolutionise science and render him celebrated. Fearful of the scandal and inconvenience of a separation, Clémentine sends the Marquis to Pierre in order to effect a reconciliation. Pierre is willing to return to his wife, but only on the condition that the mother-in-law is to have nothing to do with them. Preparatory to making his final experiment, which, we are told, will either kill or make Pierre a successful man, he sends a letter to his wife. Clémentine arrives at the laboratory just in time to be with her husband in the hour of danger. She has somehow come to see his real worth and is willing to sacrifice comfort and luxury for his sake. She hides during the experiment, and when the seven minutes necessary for its consummation are at an end she cries "Saved!" and falls into Pierre's arms:

"Oh, Pierre, my love, my life! . . . We might have died together! . . . But you are given to me again! What happiness! God is good! How I love you! Forgive me! I thought you were a coward, I thought you were base, and I hated you! Now I adore you! Oh, courage, oh, genius! Forgive your comrade, your handmaid!"

The last act shows a pretty picture of Pierre and Clémentine at home: she is the incarnation of domesticity, and he, of independence and happiness. The mother-in-law, distracted at not being able to help the couple, ends by purchasing Pierre's discovery. The play's weakness is so flagrant as hardly to call for further comment. With so good a theme the dramatist ought surely to have developed a more credible story, and sought a more logical *dénouement*. To begin with, his thesis was irretrievably weakened by making Clémentine the sort of woman she was. If, during the entire struggle with his wife and her mother, Pierre had once received some sign of sympathy from Clémentine, we might have hoped and looked for her ultimate change, but when, having stood throughout against him, she finally does go to him and at the risk of her life, stands at his side during the experiment, and then — *after* his experiment succeeds — falls into his arms, and forever after mends his clothes, we cannot doubt that we have to do with melodrama.

Had Clémentine at first been in earnest and made an honest endeavour to understand Pierre and then gradually been corrupted by her mother and her mother's money, and eventually been made to see the good qualities in Pierre, we might have believed. As it is, the last two acts spoil the play.

Technically, "Un beau Mariage" is important. A man of science as a serious stage-figure, a hero in fact, was a decided novelty in the 'fifties, and, if the play accomplished nothing else, it at least opened the way for the moderns, and broadened the field of the theatre. Possibly the doctors and other scientists in the plays of Brieux and Hervieu and Curel owe something to the earnest treatment of the chemist in this early play of Augier.

"Ceinture dorée" (1855) is little more than an expanded fable; it might well be termed "Tainted Money." The rich merchant Roussel has an only daughter, Caliste, who seeks among numerous suitors for her hand one who cares nothing for her money. Finally, M. de Tirélan makes his appearance, and Roussel offers to make him his son-in-law. But Tirélan, whose father has been ruined in business by Roussel, and who has

scruples against marrying for money, refuses. Roussel swallows the insult, Tirélan decides to go away, and Roussel turns to another suitor, whom Caliste is about to accept when she learns that Tirélan really loves her and will not ask for her hand because of her money. Meantime, Roussel has been particularly susceptible to allusions to the source of his fortune, and this susceptibility finally assumes the form of monomania. Once again Roussel makes overtures to Tirélan and offers to restore the money which he took from the young man's father. He is again refused. The knot is cut at last when it is learned that Roussel is ruined by unwise speculation. Tirélan is at last free to declare his love to Caliste; he can marry her now that the barrier of fortune is removed.

The play is so light that it hardly deserves a place among the serious plays of Augier. Yet in its own way it stands as a further document upon the social system in which hard cash plays so large and important a rôle.

To turn from the idealistic and timid "*Ceinture dorée*" to "*Les Effrontés*" (1861) is to realise in the most forceful manner the extreme poles of the genius of Emile Augier. The earlier play appears little other than the work of a dilettante beside the later. "*Les Effrontés*" is a compact yet varied picture of manners, in which the principal portrait is the parvenu Vernouillet, a vulgar, unscrupulous journalist with money and a vast amount of *aplomb* — "nerve." Respected by no one, he is held in fear by all, for he is influential and rich.

Politically, socially, dramatically, "*Les Effrontés*" is a work of the first importance. It was the first play to treat in a realistic manner the power of the press and paint a truly modern villain. Says Vernouillet: "I have put my money to the only use to which it has not hitherto been put: making public opinion. I have in my hands the two powers which the Empire has always disputed: money and the press! Each helps the other. I open up new roads to them; I am in fact making a revolution." Although "*Les Effrontés*" is at the same time a comedy of character and manners with a complicated intrigue and a love story, it was

in its day considered mainly as an attack on the press. But what was not realised so clearly in the many heated discussions aroused by the piece, was that Augier was not so much concerned with the actual state of the press — which was and is bad enough — but with the power which the press, backed by money, may exert. His purpose was larger, for it was humanitarian.

Once again he enlarged the scope of the theatre, and gave the stage a figure which is today one of the most familiar and oftenest used.

In several of Augier's plays there is a mingling of themes which, while it adds to the atmosphere and interest, often renders any distinct classification of genres, a difficult task. "Money," "Sex," "Politics," and such-like more or less arbitrary headings are not sufficient to cover more than half of Augier's plays. "Le Gendre de M. Poirier," for example, is a comedy of character, as well as a comedy of sentiment, a picture of the nobility and the bourgeoisie, and a study of the money question. "La Pierre de Touche" (1853) and "Maitre Guérin" (1865), although they are not so unified as "Le Mariage d'Olympe," may still be satisfactorily classified under the heading of "Money." The first is another of those lighter plays with "morals"; it shows the evil results of the acquisition of large sums of money by those who do not know its proper uses; the second is an interesting study in the character of a bourgeois merchant.

"Les Effrontés" has been classed among the works of Augier in which money was shown to be at the base of a great part of the evils of the social system. It is likewise one of the three political plays, of which the others are "Le Fils de Giboyer" and "Lions et Renards."

"Le Fils de Giboyer" (1862) was for the French of the day what was called an "Anticlerical" play. The Jesuits as politicians were attacked, or believed themselves to be,¹ so that

¹ In his preface to "Le Fils de Giboyer" Augier says: "In spite of what has been affirmed, this comedy is not a political piece in the current sense of the term: it is a social play. It attacks and defends only ideas, abstract conceptions of all

national discussions and conflicts arose, bitter counter-attacks made on the author and what was supposed to be his party. Augier denies (see the foot-note) that his play is political; he declares that it deals with society in a general way. As a story of father and son it indubitably suffers from what now appears as a great deal of topical and contemporaneous discussion, but that is rather the fault of the times and of the subject. The clever but unscrupulous bohemian scribbler, Giboyer — who, together with his protector D'Auberive, was one of the principal characters in "*Les Effrontés*", — has sold himself to the rich Marquis. Through political intrigues, hypocrisy, venality of the basest kind, Giboyer makes his way, until at last through his love for his son, his designated successor, he undergoes a moral "rehabilitation." The psychology of the transformation may be true enough, and would doubtless have been more credible had it been developed at greater length by a novelist like Balzac or George Eliot, but somehow we cannot believe in the sudden change, and are prone to ask how it happens that Giboyer can be redeemed by love for his son any more than could Olympe because Henri once loved her.

"*Lions et Renards*" (1869) is valuable and historically interesting as a comedy of manners and character. It is another attack on the Jesuits. But the complicated intrigue, the occasional obscurity of the motivation, were sufficient to account for the failure of the play.

Augier realized, as Balzac did, that money was the root of much evil, and, in the midst of the social readjustments which France was undergoing in the nineteenth century, he made one of the greatest of his protagonists. In the struggle between the classes, in the personal relationship of the family, the race for money and power was almost always the prime reason for social degradation and disintegration. Social position is mainly a question of money. Olympe Taverny attempted to climb, and

sorts of government. . . . The antagonism between the old and modern principles, that, in brief, is the theme of the play. I defy anyone to find a single word to warrant the assumption that I have gone beyond this."

the family suffered; Gabrielle's husband was forced to spend the time he should have had with his wife, in earning the money he thought was supporting her; marriages of love and inclination are forced to give way before marriages of convenience, which means ruin for the home and the family; the press and the Church strive for power, political and financial — the very basis and sinews of politics is cash. France, says Augier, is money-mad, and a nation which forgets what is of supreme importance — family and home and the virtues of old — is heading for destruction.

The remaining important plays are all more or less concerned with money; sometimes it hovers in the background, is only apprehended; sometimes it is obscured by other considerations, but it is always present.

"Le Gendre de M. Poirier" (1855), written in collaboration with Jules Sandeau, is without doubt one of the finest comedies of character ever written. The figure of the "bon-homme" Poirier is one of the greatest in the realm of dramatic literature. In this play Augier was less concerned with social considerations than was his wont, although money again is the basis of the action. The Marquis de Presles, a ruined member of the aristocracy, has in a way entered into a business pact with Poirier, but the business dealings of the two have been utilised by the authors chiefly as a frame in which to depict and contrast the nobleman and the bourgeois. The plot is of necessity rather thin: character is the important consideration.

The last three important plays of Augier, written after the war, might possibly be classified under the general headings which we have so far been using, but each, by reason of a comparative novelty of theme, may well be placed apart in different categories. The plays in question are "Jean de Thommeray," "Madame Caverlet," and "Les Fourchambault." Besides these, there is, however, "Le Prix Martin," written in collaboration with Eugène Labiche, a conventional and amusing little comedy.

"Jean de Thommeray" (1873) — written with Jules Sandeau,

whose novel of the same name was used as a basis — is a patriotic piece, in which a young aristocrat, succumbing to the demoralising influences of the capital, finally redeems himself by fighting for the *Patrie*. The value of the play lies rather in the separate pictures of the life of the aristocratic De Thommerays, than in the story. Jean's redemption is not very satisfactorily explained, while the plot is loose and our interest consequently wavering.

"*Madame Caverlet*" (1876) is a strong and passionate plea for divorce. Again it points out an evil in the social system which militates against the good of the family. Sir Edward Merson and his wife have been separated for a number of years. She has found consolation in the upright and honourable M. Caverlet, with whom, and her two children, she has been living in what is all but a legal status of marriage. When the daughter, however, is about to marry, Caverlet and "*Madame*" Caverlet confess to the suitor's father the truth of the case, and the proposed marriage is broken off without delay. Merson then appears, demands his son and daughter, forces Caverlet to go away, and ends by breaking up the family until he is offered a large sum of money to go to Switzerland and there become a citizen. This ameliorates the situation, as the wife can then obtain a divorce and become the lawful wife of Caverlet. But Henri, the son, completely disillusioned, joins the army and goes to a foreign country. The marriage then takes place.

We cannot but feel that Augier's case would have been stronger had he not loaded the dice. If Merson had really cared more for his wife than for her money, and had he insisted on his "rights," then the injustice of the law and its bitter consequences would have been more strikingly proved. Had Augier, as Hervieu did in "*La Loi de l'homme*," pushed his thesis to its logical conclusion, we should have had a more touchingly poignant play, as well as a stronger plea for divorce.

"*Les Fourchambault*" (1878) is the last play of Emile Augier. In structure, in character analysis, it shows no diminution in the dramatist's powers; it is indeed a proof of his deepening

sympathy and broader understanding of human life, it shows a brighter optimism and a more deep-rooted belief in the basic goodness of humanity. Viewed from a strictly logical angle, the play may seem reactionary if not contradictory, yet the young man in the early 'fifties denouncing the fallen Olympes and Navarettes, had with increasing years come to realise that there were exceptions in life, that human nature cannot always be evil. Leaving aside particular questions of the day, wishing to attack no specific institution, law, or social wrong, he bases his play on human frailty and human goodness, infusing the whole with a generous portion of good and kindly humour and gentle satire. Madame Fourchambault is after all only silly and weak, not criminally ambitious or vicious. Léopold, too, is weak, like his father, and not wicked. Madame Bernard, though she once sinned, has redeemed her error by a life of service. Marie and Bernard are almost too good. If a criticism may be urged, it is that the play is too kindly and optimistic. Bernard's and Marie's rhapsody on marriage is a little too much like a sermon. This play is Augier's idealistic swansong. It seems, that, tired of attacking, worn out by the sight of vice and stupidity, he was prompted, in his old age, to raise up an ideal of virtue, and make that ideal triumph over evil.

Augier is the Balzac of the French stage of the last century: his power of observation, his commonsense, his straightforward and honest way of speaking the truth, the great extent and variety of his work, bring him into closer relationship with the great novelist than any other dramatist of his time. Considered as a moralist or social reformer, as exponent of the domestic virtues, as champion of the fireside, he is of great importance, but as a painter of the life of his time, of the bourgeoisie as well as of the aristocracy, as a literary artist depicting living men and women, he occupies a position in French literature and drama as sure, though possibly not so exalted, as that of Molière or Balzac.

Biographical Note.—Emile Augier was born in 1820. He once said that his life was devoid of events. His first play, produced in 1844, met with considerable success, and was followed, not long after, with a series of plays which brought him first esteem and finally fame. For nearly thirty-five years he continued to put forth plays at regular and frequent intervals. Respected and beloved in his country, he died in 1889.

PLAYS BY EMILE AUGIER

La Cigüe	1844
Un Homme de bien	1845
L'Aventurière ✓	1848
Gabrielle ✓	1849
Le Joueur de Flute	1850
Diane	1852
Philiberte	1853
La Pierre de touche	1853
Le Mariage d'Olympe ✓	1854
Ceinture dorée	1855
Le Gendre de M. Poirier ✓	1855
(In collaboration with Jules Sandeau)	
La Jeunesse	1858
Les Lionnes pauvres	1858
Un beau Mariage	1859
Les Effrontés	1861
Le Fils de Giboyer	1862
Maitre Guérin	1865
La Contagion	1866
Paul Forestier	1868
Lions et Renards	1869
Jean de Thommeray	1873
(In collaboration with Jules Sandeau)	
Madame Caverlet	1876
Le Prix Martin	1877
(In collaboration with Eugène Labiche)	
Les Fourchambault ✓	1878

La Chasse au Roman (1851), written in collaboration with Jules Sandeau, is not included in the "Théâtre complet." L'Habit vert, in collaboration with Alfred de Musset, and Le Post-scriptum, are one-act plays.

Le Fils de Giboyer — as the Son of Giboyer — is to be found in translation in The Universal Anthology, also, translated by Bénédict Papot, in The Drama, no. 2. L'Habit vert is translated by Barrett H. Clark, in The World's Best Plays Series (Samuel French); likewise Le Post-scriptum (as The Green Coat and The Post-scriptum).

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OLYMPE'S MARRIAGE

(LE MARIAGE D'OLYMPE)

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

PERSONS REPRESENTED

MARQUIS DE PUYGIRON.
HENRI DE PUYGIRON.
BARON DE MONTRICHARD.
BAUDEL DE BEAUSÉJOUR.
ADOLPHE.
MARQUISE DE PUYGIRON.
GENEVIÈVE DE WURZEN.
PAULINE.
IRMA.

The scene of the first act is laid at Pilnitz, and that of the second and third acts in the home of the MARQUIS DE PUYGIRON, at Vienna.

OLYMPE'S MARRIAGE

ACT I

The scene is the conversation-room at Pilnitz, a watering-place. There are three large arched entrances at the back, opening upon a garden; a divan is in the centre; to the right stands a table with numerous newspapers on it; to the left is a small tea-table.

As the curtain rises, the MARQUIS DE PUYGIRON is seated by the table to the left, MONTRICHARD on the divan, facing the audience; BAUDEL DE BEAUSÉJOUR is likewise on the divan, but only his legs are seen by the audience.

MONTRICHARD. [*Reading his guide-book*] "Pilnitz, nine kilometres south-east of Dresden, summer residence of the Court. Castle . . . Natural waters . . . Magnificent baths . . . Casino . . ." [*Throwing down the book*] Palpitating with interest, that little book!

MARQUIS. Tell me, M. de Montrichard — you are a great authority on modern France — who is Mlle. Olympe Taverny? An actress?

MONTRICHARD. No, M. le Marquis, she is one of the most luxuriously and frequently kept women in Paris. How does it happen that her fame has reached Pilnitz?

MARQUIS. The *Constitutionnel* announces her death.

MONTRICHARD. Is that possible? A girl of twenty-five! Poor Olympe!

BAUDEL. [*Rising from behind the divan*] Is Olympe dead?

MONTRICHARD. [*After looking for the person who is speaking.*] Did Monsieur know her?

BAUDEL. [*Embarrassed*] Just as — everyone did — hm — yes, very well.

MONTRICHARD. What was the cause of her death?

MARQUIS. Here's the item: [*He reads*] "Our California correspondent writes, 'Yellow fever has just claimed as its victim one of the most charming of our young compatriots, Mlle. Olympe Taverny. A week after her arrival in San Francisco she met her death.'"

MONTRICHARD. What the devil was she doing in California? She had an income of ten thousand francs!

BAUDEL. Which she must have lost in investments.

MONTRICHARD. [*To the MARQUIS*] It has always seemed to me the most cruel injustice that these happy young creatures should be exposed to so serious an accident as death, the same as honest women are.

MARQUIS. That is the only possible way for them to make regular their position in society. But what surprises me is that the papers give her long death-notices.

MONTRICHARD. [*At the right of the table*] You have been away from France for some time, have you not, M. le Marquis?

MARQUIS. Since the *Vendée* — 1832.

MONTRICHARD. There have been great changes in twenty-two years.

MARQUIS. So I imagine: *then* things were going from bad to worse. But — the devil! — then, at least, there was some sentiment of public modesty.

MONTRICHARD. What can public modesty do in the face of facts? The existence of this class of women is one of the facts I refer to. These women have passed out of the lower strata of society and come into the broad daylight. They constitute a little world of their own which makes its orbit in the rest of the universe. They go about, give and attend dances, have families, and gamble on the Bourse. Men don't bow to them as yet when they are with mothers or sisters, but they are none the less taken to the Bois in open carriages; in the theatre they occupy prominent boxes — and the men are not considered cynics.

BAUDEL. Exactly.

MARQUIS. That's all very curious. In my day the boldest man would never dream of parading himself in that way!

MONTRICHARD. Well, in your day this new social circle was still in the swamp; now it's dried up, if not thoroughly renovated. You used to hunt in high-top boots, buckled up to the belt; now we walk about in pumps. Streets have been cut through, squares, whole residential sections. Like the city of Paris, society takes in new suburbs every fifty years. This latest is the *Thirteenth Arrondissement*. Do you know, these women have so strong a hold on the public that they have even been made the heroines of plays?

MARQUIS. In the theatre? Women who—? And the audience accepts that?

MONTRICHARD. Without a murmur—which proves that having made their entrée into comedy, they have done likewise into correct society.

MARQUIS. You could knock me down with a feather!

MONTRICHARD. Then what have you to say when I tell you that these ladies manage to get married?

MARQUIS. To captains of industry?

MONTRICHARD. No, indeed—to sons of good families.

MARQUIS. Idiots of good families!

MONTRICHARD. No, no. The bane of our day is the rehabilitation of the lost woman—fallen woman, we say. Our poets, novelists, dramatists, fill the heads of the young generation with romantic ideas of redemption through love, the virginity of the soul, and other paradoxes of transcendental philosophy. These young women must become ladies, grand ladies!

MARQUIS. Grand ladies?

MONTRICHARD. Marriage is their final catch; the fish must be worth the trouble, you see.

MARQUIS. [*Rising*] Good God! And the father-in-law doesn't strangle a woman in a case of the sort?

MONTRICHARD. [*Also rising*] What about the law, M. le Marquis?

BAUDEL *rises and walks slowly down-stage to the left.*

MARQUIS. Devil take the law then! If your laws permit such shame to fall upon good families, if a common prostitute can tarnish the honour of a whole family by marrying one of its drunkard sons, it is the father's right to take his name from the thief of his honour, even if it were glued to her skin like Nessus' tunic.

MONTRICHARD. That's rather a brutal form of justice for the present age, is it not, M. le Marquis?

MARQUIS. Possibly, but I am not a man of the present age.

BAUDEL. But, M. le Marquis, suppose the woman in question does not drag her stolen plumage in the gutter?

MARQUIS. I cannot admit the hypothesis, Monsieur.

BAUDEL. Is it not possible that she should like to give up her former life and want to lead a quiet and pure existence ——?

MARQUIS. Put a duck on a lake among swans, and you will observe that the duck regrets its mire, and will end by returning there.

MONTRICHARD. Home-sickness for the mud!

BAUDEL. Then you don't believe in repentant Magdalens?

MARQUIS. I do — in the desert.

The MARQUISE and GENEVIÈVE come in through an archway.

MARQUIS. Shh! Messieurs, beware of chaste ears!

MONTRICHARD. And how are Mme. la Marquise and Mlle. Geneviève?

MARQUISE. Much better, thank you, Monsieur. — Have you seen the papers, dear?

MARQUIS. Yes, dear, and I am now at your disposal.

GENEVIÈVE. No news from Turkey, grandfather?

MARQUIS. No, my child.

MONTRICHARD. Are you interested in the war, Mademoiselle?

GENEVIÈVE. I should so like to be a man and fight!

MARQUISE. Hush, child.

GENEVIÈVE. I'm not so stupid — or if I am, I owe it to you, grandmother. — You shouldn't blame me!

MARQUISE. [*Tapping GENEVIÈVE gently on the cheek, then going toward her husband.*] Coming to the spring, Tancrede? It's time.

MARQUIS. Very well. [*To the others*] We invalids are here to take the waters. — My arm, Marquise. And you lead the way, granddaughter. [*To his wife*] Sleep better?

MARQUISE. [*To her husband*] Almost well; and you?

MARQUIS. So did I. [*They go out.* MONTRICHARD escorts them to the door and returns.]

BAUDEL. [*To MONTRICHARD*] I am delighted, Monsieur, to have made your acquaintance.

MONTRICHARD. When did I have the honour, Monsieur —?

BAUDEL. Why — here — just now —

MONTRICHARD. The few words we exchanged together? Good Lord, you are a quick acquaintance-maker!

BAUDEL. I have known you a long time, by reputation. I have always wanted to be counted among your friends.

MONTRICHARD. That's too good of you! Though my friendship is not a temple of etiquette, people do not as a rule enter it unannounced. [*Aside*] Who is the fellow?

BAUDEL. [*Bowing*] Anatole de Beauséjour —

MONTRICHARD. Knight of Malta?

BAUDEL. I confess it.

MONTRICHARD. Fifteen hundred francs — and what did the title of Beauséjour cost you?

BAUDEL. Two hundred thousand in land.

MONTRICHARD. Dear enough. You deserve another — a little less expensive.

BAUDEL. Ha, ha! Good! Baudel, Monsieur, is my patronymic.

MONTRICHARD. Baudel? Just as the Montmorency were called Bouchard. I seem to have heard your name somewhere before, Monsieur. Didn't you apply for membership in the Jockey Club last year?

BAUDEL. I did.

MONTRICHARD. And you were refused because you were — one moment! — because your father was a milliner?

BAUDEL. He financed the concern: partner of Mlle. Aglaë.

MONTRICHARD. Partner, yes. Well, Monsieur, if I were your father's son I should call myself merely Baudel. It's no disgrace to be bald; only when one wears a wig does one run the risk of appearing ridiculous, M. de Beauséjour. And so — your very humble —

He is about to leave.

BAUDEL. [*Intercepting him*] Monsieur, the estate of Beauséjour is situated on the road to Orléans, thirty-three kilometres from Paris. Could you tell me where Montrichard lies?

MONTRICHARD. [*Returning to BAUDEL*] Three impertinent fellows have asked me the same question. To the first I replied that it was situated in the Bois de Boulogne;¹ to the second, in the Bois de Vincennes;¹ to the third, in the Forest of St. Germain.¹ I accompanied each of these three sceptics to the duelling grounds; they returned convinced — grievously convinced — so convinced that no one has since dared repeat the question. I trust, Monsieur, that you no longer desire the information?

BAUDEL. You refer to pleasure parties on your estates, I take it? You forget, perhaps, that there are other places for such? Spa, Homburg, Baden, and — Pilnitz!

MONTRICHARD. Monsieur then insists on a wound?

BAUDEL. Yes, Monsieur, I need one. I have arranged this little conversation with that end in view.

They sit down at the table.

MONTRICHARD. Very well, M. Baudel. But I warn you that you have already an inch of steel in your arm. Take good care that the weapon goes no deeper!

¹ Famous places for duelling.

BAUDEL. I am fully aware that Monsieur is the best swordsman in Paris. Your blade stands you in good stead of everything, including a genealogy.

MONTRICHARD. Two inches.

BAUDEL. Of an ambiguous title, relying entirely upon chance. You have by your bravado and your cleverness made an entrée in the world of fashion and high life; you are even one of the leaders in that world, where you always behave like a perfect gentleman: spending generously, never borrowing — a good gambler, good comrade, dead shot, and a gallant knight.

MONTRICHARD. Three inches.

BAUDEL. Unfortunately, however, you have recently lost your luck. You are now without a sou, and are looking for fifty thousand francs with which to tempt fortune once again. You cannot find the money.

MONTRICHARD. Five inches!

BAUDEL. I shall loan you that amount.

MONTRICHARD. Ha!

BAUDEL. Now how many inches?

MONTRICHARD. That depends on the conditions you make. You have conditions?

BAUDEL. Yes.

MONTRICHARD. Speak, M. de Beauséjour.

BAUDEL. It's quite simple: I should like —

MONTRICHARD. What?

BAUDEL. The devil! It's not so simple as it seemed.

MONTRICHARD. I am very intelligent!

BAUDEL. Monsieur, I have an income of a hundred and twenty-three thousand francs.

MONTRICHARD. You are fortunate.

BAUDEL. No, I am not. I have received a gentleman's education and I have aristocratic instincts. My fortune and my breeding call me to the more brilliant realms of society —

MONTRICHARD. And your birth stands in your way.

BAUDEL. Precisely. Every time I knock at the door, it is closed in my face. In order to enter and to remain, I must

fight a dozen duels. Now, I am no more of a coward than the average man, but I have a hundred and twenty-three thousand reasons for wanting to live, while my adversary as a rule would have only thirty or forty thousand. It's not too unevenly matched.

MONTRICHARD. I understand: you want to earn your spurs once for all, and you turn to me?

BAUDEL. That's it.

MONTRICHARD. But, my dear Monsieur, my inserting an inch of steel into your arm will not prove that you're a good swordsman.

BAUDEL. That is not exactly ——

MONTRICHARD. Then what ——?

BAUDEL. It's rather a delicate matter to explain.

MONTRICHARD. Say it out — let us be frank.

BAUDEL. You are right: I propose a bargain.

MONTRICHARD. For what? You remind me of a bottle of that sort of champagne that takes a quarter of an hour to blow the cork out! Good God, man, ask for a corkscrew!

BAUDEL. Monsieur, your device is *Cruore dives*, isn't it?

MONTRICHARD. Yes, Monsieur, *Cruore dives*; *Enriched by his blood*. This was not my own invention: it was given by Louis XIV to my great-grandfather four generations ago; he received eight wounds at the Battle of Senef.

BAUDEL. What was the estate worth at the time?

MONTRICHARD. One million.

BAUDEL. [*Lowering his eyes*] Twenty-five thousand francs a wound. I am not as rich as Louis XIV, Monsieur, but there are wounds and wounds. A scratch on the arm, for instance — doesn't that seem worth fifty thousand francs?

MONTRICHARD. [*Severely*] Do you mean you wish to buy a wound? You're mad!

BAUDEL. Bear in mind that it is more to my interest than yours to keep the matter a secret. There is nothing reprehensible in the arrangement: the price of blood has always been an honourable thing. Your own device proves that.

MONTRICHARD. [*After a moment's hesitation*] You know, I like you — I couldn't for the life of me say why — but I like you. It will be very amusing to make you a man of the world. I'll take that wound from you, but — gratis, you understand?

BAUDEL. [*To himself*] That will cost more — but I don't mind!

MONTRICHARD. Send your seconds.

BAUDEL. But the cause of the quarrel?

MONTRICHARD. Your name is Baudel. I am said to have suggested that you cross the L.¹

BAUDEL. Good! Montrichard, a duel to the bitter end!

MONTRICHARD. And afterward we shall have a housewarming for our new friendship at the Hotel du Grand Scanderburg. I shall await your seconds here, my dear M. Baudel.

BAUDEL. De Beauséjour.

MONTRICHARD. Yes, yes: de Beauséjour. [BAUDEL goes out] There's a queer type! I'll make something of him: first a friend — very attached — with a string to his paw —! This duel is exactly what I needed to set me going once again. Montrichard, the hour of fate has sounded, the hour of marriage! [*He goes to the door, meets PAULINE and bows to her.*]

MONTRICHARD. You? You're not dead, then? Why, the papers are full of it!

PAULINE. Doubtless a mistake!

MONTRICHARD. Aren't you Olympe Taverny?

PAULINE. Ah, I thought so! This is not the first time I have had the honour to be mistaken for that lady. I am the Countess de Puygiron, Monsieur.

MONTRICHARD. A thousand pardons, Madame! The resemblance is so striking! Even your voice —! You will excuse me for making so natural a mistake? Especially as this is as likely a place to meet Olympe Taverny as the Countess de Puygiron. I beg your pardon once more, Madame.

PAULINE. [*Going down-stage to the right*] Of course, Monsieur. I was looking for my uncle and aunt here.

¹ Which makes the word "Baudet"; "ass."

MONTRICHARD. They are at the spring. M. le Marquis never told me his nephew was married.

PAULINE. For an excellent reason: he didn't know it himself.

MONTRICHARD. Ah!

PAULINE. It's a surprise that my husband and I have in store for him. Please be good enough, therefore, not to tell him of our arrival, if you happen to see him before we do. Or — will you please show me the way to the spring?

MONTRICHARD. Do me the honour of taking my arm, Madame. I have the good fortune to be slightly acquainted with your family. [*Bowing*] Baron de Montrichard — most pleased to — this is nonsense, introducing an old friend!

PAULINE. Monsieur!

MONTRICHARD. Are you afraid I'll tell? You know I'm always on the woman's side. You and I can help each other; in my own interest, if for no other reason, I am bound to be discreet on your score.

PAULINE. In what way, M. de — de — Montrichard, can I be fortunate enough to serve you?

MONTRICHARD. Ah, you're defiant? Do you want security? I'm only too pleased. I am thinking of marrying: your great-uncle, the Marquis de Puygiron, has a charming granddaughter. I have just made her acquaintance, but have not as yet been received into the family circle. If you will arrange that for me and further my suit, I shall see to it that whoever has the impertinence to recognise you will have to deal with me.

He holds out his hand to her. PAULINE looks quickly about to see whether anyone else is present.

PAULINE. [*Taking his hand*] How did you recognize me?

MONTRICHARD. First, your face, then that little pink mark on your beloved ivory neck. The mark I used to adore!

PAULINE. Do you still remember it?

MONTRICHARD. You were my only real love.

PAULINE. And you mine, dear Edouard.

MONTRICHARD. No, no — Alfred — you're mixing the names. Your "only real love" has had so many names! What the devil put it into your head to marry? You were very happy before?

PAULINE. Did you ever happen to notice, when you stepped out into the boulevard, that you had left your cane in the restaurant?

MONTRICHARD. Yes.

PAULINE. And you went back for it. There in the private dining-room you saw the wreckage of the orgy: candelabra in which the lights were burned out; tablecloth removed; a candle-end on the table which was all covered with grease and stained with wine. Instead of lights and laughter and heavy perfumes, that made the place gay not long since, were solitude, silence, and a stale odor. The gilded furniture seemed like strangers to you, to everyone, even to themselves. Not a single article among all this that seemed familiar, not one was reminiscent of the absent master of the house or awaited his return. Complete abandonment!

MONTRICHARD. Exactly.

PAULINE. Well, my life is rather like that of the private dining-room. I must be gay or utterly lonely — there is no possible compromise. Are you surprised then that the restaurant aspires to the dignity of the home?

MONTRICHARD. Not to mention a certain taste for virtue that you must have acquired?

PAULINE. You're joking?

MONTRICHARD. No, virtue is for you a new play-thing, I might almost say, forbidden fruit. Let me warn you that it will set your teeth on edge.

PAULINE. We shall see.

MONTRICHARD. The career of an honest woman is a fearful undertaking!

PAULINE. It can't compare with ^{ours}! If you only knew how much energy it required to ruin a man!

MONTRICHARD. No matter, you are now Countess de Puygiron. Now tell me what is the meaning of the news of your death in the *Constitutionnel*?

PAULINE. A note my mother sent to all the papers.

MONTRICHARD. How is good old Irma, by the way?

PAULINE. Very well and happy. When I married, I gave her all I had — furniture, jewels, income.

MONTRICHARD. That was something of a consolation for losing you.

PAULINE. So you see how necessary it was to throw people off the scent? Thanks to this plan, no one will dare recognise Olympe Taverny in the Countess de Puygiron. Now, dear, you know if I had persisted in not being recognised, you would have retired with excuses — that is, if you hadn't given me your security.

MONTRICHARD. Suppose you happen to meet one of your friends who knew of your *liaison* with the Count?

PAULINE. No one knew of it.

MONTRICHARD. Ah!

PAULINE. Henri took me seriously from the very first. He was most discreet: Didier and Marion Delorme, you see! You must know that I've played my cards well. I talked of going into a convent; then he asked me to marry him, and I accepted. I pretended I was going to California. Henri met me in Brittany; I married him there a year ago, under my real name, Pauline Morin.

MONTRICHARD. Is he as big a fool as that?

PAULINE. You insulting creature! He's a very intelligent and charming young man.

MONTRICHARD. Then how does it happen that —?

PAULINE. He never had a mistress — his father was very severe with him. When he became of age, he was as innocent as —

MONTRICHARD. As you — at the age of four! Poor fellow!

PAULINE. He's not to be pitied; he's very happy with me.

MONTRICHARD. Do you love him?

PAULINE. That is not the question. I strew his path with flowers — artificial, perhaps, but they are prettier and more lasting than real ones.

MONTRICHARD. Truly, do you think the game worth the candle?

PAULINE. So far, I don't. We've been spending ten months alone in Brittany — all by ourselves. For the past two months we've been travelling, alone again. I can't say that we've been hilarious. I live the life of a recluse, going from hotel to hotel; with the maids, servants, and postilions, I am "Madame la Comtesse." All that would be dull enough if I hadn't other dreams for the future — but I have. Now that Olympe Taverny (God rest her soul!) has had time to go to California and die and be mourned for in Paris, I can boldly enter society by the front door, which the Marquis de Puygiron is to open for me.

MONTRICHARD. Is your husband going to introduce you to his uncle?

PAULINE. Indeed he is! But he's not expecting the kind of meeting I have planned!

MONTRICHARD. There's a fine fellow caught in a trap!

PAULINE. It's all for his own happiness! If he introduces me as an honest woman, he will not be lying: for a year I have been the personification of virtue. I have a new skin.

MONTRICHARD. You have only to shed it, Countess!

PAULINE. Impertinent! — Here is my husband!

MONTRICHARD *walks away and bows ceremoniously to PAULINE.*
Enter HENRI.

MONTRICHARD. Will you be good enough, Madame, to present me to M. le Comte?

PAULINE. My friend, M. le Baron de Montrichard.

HENRI. [*Bowing*] Monsieur.

PAULINE. We owe our acquaintance to a rather strange

accident: M. de Montrichard, when he saw me come in, mistook me for — you know whom I am thought to resemble?

MONTRICHARD. The mistake was all the more inexcusable as the person you speak of recently died in California, and I do not believe in ghosts.

PAULINE. Is the poor creature dead? Well, I haven't the courage to mourn her! Let us hope I shan't again be mistaken for her!

HENRI. Take care, Madame, perhaps M. de Montrichard feels the loss more keenly than you?

MONTRICHARD. Right, Monsieur, I thought a great deal of the lady. Her heart was much above her station in life.

HENRI. Ah? Doubtless Monsieur was in a position to appreciate her better than anyone else?

MONTRICHARD. No, Monsieur, no. My relations with her were always of a very brief and friendly nature.

HENRI. [*Shaking hands with him cordially*] I am very glad to have made your acquaintance, Monsieur — we must become friends!

MONTRICHARD. Monsieur! [*To himself*] I feel sorry for him!

A servant enters.

SERVANT. Two gentlemen who wish to see M. de Montrichard.

MONTRICHARD. [*To himself*] Baudel's seconds! [*Aloud*] Good, I shall be with them in a moment. [*The servant goes out*] I hope, M. le Comte, that we shall soon find an opportunity of continuing the conversation? — Madame!

HENRI. [*To himself, as he sees his uncle*] My Uncle!

MONTRICHARD. [*Meeting the MARQUIS at the door*] M. le Marquis, you find yourself in the bosom of your family. [*He goes out*]

The MARQUIS and the MARQUISE enter.

MARQUIS. It's Henri! My dear boy, what a surprise! [*He opens his arms; HENRI kisses him, then kisses the MARQUISE*]

hand] Three years without coming to see us! And not a letter for a whole year! How ungrateful of you!

MARQUISE. What of it? Family affection doesn't die out like other affection, through absence or silence. Two hundred leagues away, when we were both grieving for the same reason, we were together in our sorrow.

MARQUIS. We expected you just before your poor father's death. We thought you would feel the need of being with us.

PAULINE *has meantime gone to the archway, without losing sight of the others. She takes off her hat, lays it on a chair, then comes forward.*

HENRI. I was very, very lonely and I thought of you, but important business affairs —

MARQUIS. I understand — the will and so forth. The most painful part of human bereavements is that we cannot escape from material worries. Well, here you are at last, and we are very happy to see you.

MARQUISE. How did you know we were here?

HENRI. The fact is, I didn't. I expected to meet you in Vienna, at the end of my German tour.

MARQUIS. Heaven bless the chance that brought you to us, then! We have you and we mean to keep you.

HENRI. I should be only too glad to spend some days with you, only I was just passing through Pilnitz! I must leave in an hour —

MARQUIS. Nonsense!

HENRI. It's a matter of great importance —

MARQUIS. What an idea! There can't be anything to prevent — ?

HENRI. Excuse me. [*He looks toward PAULINE, who stands near the table. The MARQUIS watches him*]

MARQUIS. Ah? [*Aside to Henri*] You're not travelling alone? Well, youth is youth! [*Aloud*] If you have only an hour to stay here, let us spend the time together at least!

Our hotel is just two steps from here. Give your aunt your arm:

The MARQUIS takes his hat. HENRI offers his arm to his aunt; they start for the door.

PAULINE. I shall wait for you here, Henri.

MARQUIS. [*Turning round*] You lack tact, Mademoiselle!

HENRI. [*Going to PAULINE and taking her hand*] Uncle, I have the honour to present you to the Countess de Puygiron.

MARQUISE. The Countess de Puygiron?

MARQUIS. Are you married?

HENRI. Yes, Uncle.

MARQUIS. [*Severely*] How does it happen, Monsieur, that I, the head of the family, knew nothing of this?

HENRI. Let me postpone an explanation in which my self-respect and my duty toward you could not but suffer. I did not come to Pilnitz to see you, and I have no intention of antagonising you by my presence here. In leaving you, I believe that I am paying you all the deference at present due you.

MARQUIS. This has nothing to do with deference, Monsieur! In families like ours there exists a solidarity of honour which is not to be trifled with or put aside by a caprice. Ask me what I have done with our family name and I shall answer that I have never spotted it except with my blood. Now I command you to give me your account!

HENRI. Command? When I married Pauline, I broke with the family. I therefore have the right to be rid of any duty toward it, as I ask none of its privileges.

MARQUISE. Henri, my child, can't you be a little more conciliatory?

MARQUIS. Madame, do not believe for an instant that it is Henri who is speaking! Can't you see that this spirit of revolt has been put into him by someone else?

HENRI. You are mistaken, Monsieur: I respect what deserves respect. But the prejudices and absurd conventions,

the hypocrisy and tyranny of society — nothing could prevent my despising them as they deserve to be despised!

MARQUIS. Whom have you married in order to set society at defiance?

HENRI. I prefer not to say.

PAULINE. Why not, dearest? You must not allow your uncle to believe your marriage worse than a misalliance! That would kill him! Let me reassure him! His sense of honour will surely — ? Then we may go.

HENRI. Very well. [*He walks away*]

PAULINE. My name is Pauline Morin, M. le Marquis; I am the daughter of an honest farmer.

MARQUIS. You a farmer's daughter? But your manners, your language — ?

PAULINE. My dear mother gave me an education far beyond my station.

MARQUIS. Possibly! — Come, Marquise. [*He offers his arm to the MARQUISE, and they turn to go*]

PAULINE. Please stay. I ought to leave if my presence is disagreeable to you!

MARQUIS. You really cannot expect to be publicly received into a family which you entered in secret? [*HENRI is about to speak*]

PAULINE. And why not in secret? Tell me what you suspect, M. le Marquis? My marriage must seem to you a very treacherous and bold stroke.

MARQUIS. That would not be at all necessary with a child like Henri!

HENRI. But she wanted to go into a convent!

PAULINE. It was a comedy, a cruel comedy! Whom could you hope to persuade of my sincerity? Who would admit that a girl of low birth, when she found in you all the intelligence and goodness of heart she had always dreamed, would give up her secret soul to you? You were very simple to believe it — ask your uncle. If I had really loved you, would I not have refused to become your wife? Would I not, M. le Marquis?

HENRI. And do you imagine she didn't refuse? She made every possible objection that you yourself would have made.

PAULINE. I was defending not only your happiness, but my own. [HENRI *sits down at the table*] Do you think I had a beautiful dream, M. le Marquis? If you only knew what I am suffering! But I have no right to complain; I anticipated what was going to happen. [To HENRI] I asked God for one year of your love in exchange for the happiness of a lifetime. He has kept His bargain, and given me even a little extra for full measure: for you still love me.

HENRI. [*His arms extended toward her*] I do love you! I love you as much as I did the first days of our love.

PAULINE. Poor dear! You don't realise what is going on within you! Perhaps I'm wrong to tell you — but it's only what you will learn soon enough. Your affection is already waning and you are being worn out by the struggle you are making against the conventions of society. Your family traditions, which you have shattered, and which you call prejudices, are now rising up one after the other —

MARQUISE. [*To her husband*] That's true enough.

PAULINE. You are resisting, I know, and you are already angry that your happiness is not rewarded enough for the sacrifices you are forced to make, but every day these sacrifices grow greater, and the reward less. When you leave here, you will feel the weight of loneliness bearing down on you; you will see with other eyes the woman who ought always to stand you in stead of family, friends, society — and before long the regret of what you have given up for me will change to remorse.

MARQUISE. [*To her husband*] She doesn't speak like a woman who's trying to deceive us!

PAULINE. But never fear, dearest, the day that happens I shall give you back all you have lost for my sake, and your love for me will be my whole life.

HENRI. Who can listen to you and not adore you?

MARQUISE. [*To her husband*] Poor woman!

PAULINE. Goodby, M. le Marquis, and forgive me for having the honour to bear your name — I am paying dear for it!

MARQUISE. [*To her husband*] Say something nice to her.

MARQUIS. Only my rigid principles, which I have always adhered to, separate us — to my regret.

PAULINE. Thank you! I go away proud, for I feel that I am at least esteemed by the Great Marquis!

MARQUIS. Do you know my *nom de guerre*?

PAULINE. I am the daughter of a *Vendéen*!

HENRI. [*To himself*] What's this?

MARQUISE. Daughter of a *Vendéen*?

PAULINE. Who died with honour on the field of battle.

MARQUIS. In what battle?

PAULINE. Chanay.

MARQUIS. I wasn't there, but our men fought valiantly that day! What did you say was your father's name?

PAULINE. Yvon Morin.

MARQUIS. I don't recall —

PAULINE. I scarcely thought you would: he was only a common soldier — of your cause.

MARQUIS. We were all equals, made noble by our faith. If there had been distinctions it was death only that made them! [*To HENRI*] Why didn't you tell me you were marrying the daughter of a *Vendéen*? That's not a misalliance! Your father shed his blood with ours, Countess!

PAULINE. Oh, M. le Marquis!

MARQUIS. Your uncle! [*Stretches out his arms toward PAULINE, who falls into them.*]

MARQUISE. [*As PAULINE kisses her hand*] I was sure Henri would not contract a marriage unworthy of him!

MARQUIS. [*To HENRI*] Now you won't leave, will you?

HENRI. Uncle —

MARQUIS. Go if you like, only we shall keep your wife. Come to our hotel, Countess; I should like to introduce you to my granddaughter. This proud nobleman will certainly follow you!

HENRI. Yes, we shall join you soon, Uncle.

MARQUIS. Don't make us wait too long — we shan't sit down to dinner until you come. [*He shakes hands with PAULINE and HENRI and goes toward the door*] It's the *Lion d'or*. [*He goes out with the MARQUISE*]

HENRI. Swear to me that you didn't know my Uncle was here! Swear — on your life!

PAULINE. On my life, on my mother! You suspect something too terrible for words, I know!

HENRI. Forgive me! You can see how I suffer. I sometimes even doubt you. This story you seemed to invent on the spur of the moment —

PAULINE. You think it was prepared?

HENRI. I did — and my heart sank.

PAULINE. Poor child! You thought I married in order to get into the family, and become a Countess?

HENRI. Yes.

PAULINE. That my sole ambition was to climb? Oh, Henri, how could you have so low an opinion of me?

HENRI. Forgive me — I'm not at all well.

PAULINE. I know, and for that very reason I wanted you to be with your family once more. My love is not enough in itself — but rather than have you suspect me, I should tell the whole truth to your uncle.

HENRI. It would kill him — I know it would kill him! [*He throws himself upon the divan*]

PAULINE. [*Sitting beside him*] Then we'll go tomorrow, if this lie is troubling you —

HENRI. It is. Your intention was good — thank you for that! But I have no right to fly in the face of my uncle's prejudices with a lie. Every time he shook hands with me, every time you spoke to any member of my family, would be an abuse of confidence for which I should blush.

PAULINE. [*Embracing him*] We'll go tonight. Those clouds on your forehead must disappear, you adorable boy! I ask nothing more than to be with you, alone! Come now, let

us join those people whose peace of mind gives you so much worry.

HENRI. You angel!

PAULINE. Ah, *you* have given me wings! [*She gives him her arm coquettishly.* HENRI *kisses her forehead.* To herself] Countess, ah!

ACT II

The scene is in the MARQUIS' home in Vienna. The spacious family drawing-room is decorated in the style of Louis XIII with recessed walls, wainscoted from top to bottom in carved oak. There are doors at the back and at each side; in the recess of the left wall is a large fireplace above which hangs a full-length portrait of the MARQUISE. On each side of the picture is a candelabrum with five candles. In the recess to the right is a deep-set window. Toward the back on the same side is a Venetian mirror.

As the curtain rises, the MARQUISE and GENEVIÈVE are seated embroidering. The MARQUIS stands by the fireplace. PAULINE is half-reclining on a small sofa.

MARQUISE. You must not forget, Tancredè, that we are dining at Mme. de Ransberg's.

MARQUIS. I shan't forget: you know I adore Mme. de Ransberg!

MARQUISE. And I believe your affection is returned! If she were thirty years older I might be jealous.

GENEVIÈVE. On the contrary, grandmother: rather just because she *is* twenty, it seems to me —

MARQUISE. That she is no match for you, who are sixty.

GENEVIÈVE. Do you think the victor is always the one with the heavy battalions?

MARQUISE. In matters of friendship, yes.

MARQUIS. I am very grateful to the dear little Baroness for the way she welcomed our Pauline.

GENEVIÈVE. Then you have reason to be grateful to all Vienna, for that matter.

MARQUIS. I don't deny that. I have been touched and flattered, I admit, by her reception here.

GENEVIÈVE. You might almost imagine that we were concealing contraband goods!

MARQUIS. I'm foolish, like the ass with the burden of relics!

GENEVIÈVE. [*Rising*] Did you hear that, Pauline?

PAULINE. [*Emerging from her reverie*] What?

GENEVIÈVE. [*Going to PAULINE*] So much the worsel! See what you've lost! That will teach you to join in the conversation!

PAULINE. I'm not feeling well.

MARQUISE. Not yet?

GENEVIÈVE. You're never well, are you?

PAULINE. It's nothing. [*To herself*] What a bore!

MARQUIS. [*Sitting by the Marquise*] We made you stay up too late last night — you're not used to it!

PAULINE. That's so.

GENEVIÈVE. But the party was such fun!

PAULINE. [*To herself*] Like a rainy day!

GENEVIÈVE. Mme. de Rosenthal is so jolly! She breathes an air of gaiety all about her. Such a brilliant soirée! Even the old people at their whist must have been excited!

MARQUISE. My partner, the Chevalier de Falkenstein, took my kings every time —

MARQUIS. His excuse was Pauline's laughter — it distracted his attention.

GENEVIÈVE. A deaf man with a sharp ear! Pauline didn't move and she won enormously.

MARQUISE. Really?

PAULINE. Enormously? A hundred francs, at the outside.

MARQUIS. That's good, at a franc a point. But I have an idea you don't care for gambling?

PAULINE. I don't, M. le Marquis, I don't — [*To herself*] at a franc a point.

GENEVIÈVE. Pauline is so serious that I think she's bored by all this frivolous society.

MARQUISE. Yes, and she seemed, beforehand, to expect a wonderful time!

PAULINE. I imagined it was going to be something far different from this!

MARQUIS. You are too serious for your years, my dear niece.

PAULINE. Perhaps.

MARQUISE. But society is not altogether a matter of frivolity. If you are bored with the young people, why don't you talk with the older ones? You could certainly find something worth while to talk about with them?

PAULINE. Madame, I am ashamed to confess that the topics of conversation in society do not appeal to me: I am a barbarian. I've lived too long in our primitive Brittany.

MARQUIS. We shall civilise you, my dear child. What is the weather like?

GENEVIÈVE. [*Going to the window*] Superb!

MARQUISE. It won't last.

MARQUIS. Does your wound still pain you?

MARQUISE. What wound?

GENEVIÈVE. [*Returning*] You didn't know that grandmother was once a soldier?

MARQUIS. Geneviève!

GENEVIÈVE. [*Going to the MARQUIS*] Did that displease you?

MARQUISE. No, dear.

MARQUIS. You allow her too great liberty — she's too familiar with you.

MARQUISE. Familiarity is the small-change of tenderness. We are too old to object to that.

MARQUIS. Very well. That child speaks to you sometimes in a way I shouldn't dare to do!

GENEVIÈVE. This is between grandmother and me, grandfather. It doesn't concern you.

MARQUISE. Geneviève, you are forgetting yourself!

GENEVIÈVE. You're as severe as grandfather. Did I annoy you, grandfather?

MARQUIS. No, dear. With me I allow you certain liberties —

GENEVIÈVE. Then you are as indulgent as grandmother! [*She kisses him*]

MARQUIS. That child is twisting us round her little finger, Marquise.

GENEVIÈVE. [*Taking a hand of each of her grandparents in her own*] Forgive my little trick: I only wanted to try an experiment. Henri spoke of the respect each of you had for the other —

MARQUIS. Are you surprised that I respect your grandmother?

GENEVIÈVE. Oh no, but I never dreamed how far it went! Henri called my attention to it: "How beautiful it is," he said, "to see those two lives so bound up in each other! Old age without a blemish! Two hearts that have gone through life inseparable, two beings whom the battles of life have brought closer together. The head and the saint of the family" —

PAULINE. [*To herself*] Philemon and Baucis!

GENEVIÈVE. And tears came into his eyes — tears of admiration and tenderness.

MARQUISE. Dear Henri!

MARQUIS. He's right, dear — your grandmother *is* a saint!

MARQUISE. [*Smiling*] Tancred, it isn't your place to sanctify me!

MARQUIS. Would you like to hear about that wound, Pauline? I'll tell you: the Marquise came with me to the Château of Pénisicière — you know the details of that terrible siege! — When fire broke out and forced us to leave the Château, we retreated fighting all the way to a little wood where we separated after firing our last volley. The Marquise and I made our way to a farm-house, where we hid. As the door opened she fainted, and then I noticed that she had been hit by a bullet!

[*Taking her hand*] My dear wife! That wound will be counted among your good deeds, in Heaven!

MARQUISE. I hope not, dear. You have given me reward enough on earth.

PAULINE. Noble! [*To herself*] Poseurs!

GENEVIÈVE. I should like to be your age and have done that!

MARQUISE. I think you would do the same as I did under the circumstances.

GENEVIÈVE. I would! So would Pauline!

MARQUISE. Of course: she is Bretonne.

PAULINE. [*To herself*] They'll soon begin to think that we have done it!

A servant enters.

SERVANT. The carriage is ready. [*He goes out*]

MARQUIS. [*To the MARQUISE*] Come, my dear—[*To GENEVIÈVE and PAULINE*] We'll come back and get you for dinner. Now you may dress, ladies.

GENEVIÈVE. We have plenty of time.

PAULINE. May I not be excused?

MARQUIS. Impossible, dear, the dinner is given in your honour. [*The MARQUIS and MARQUISE go out at the back*]

PAULINE. [*To herself*] What a bore! [*To GENEVIÈVE*] Where do they go every day at the same hour?

GENEVIÈVE. They say they go out for a drive, but no one ever sees them.

PAULINE. A mystery!

GENEVIÈVE. I know, but I pretend not to: they visit the poor.

PAULINE. But why the mystery?

GENEVIÈVE. Shouldn't charity always be secret?

PAULINE. Yes, of course. [*To herself*] Oh dear, what people! I don't know what to do next.

GENEVIÈVE. Where is Henri?

PAULINE. I have no idea — probably visiting the poor.

GENEVIÈVE. He seems rather depressed lately.

PAULINE. He's never been over-gay: he's a melancholy boy.

GENEVIÈVE. You don't know of any hidden trouble, do you?

PAULINE. My dear, melancholy comes from the stomach. Healthy people are never melancholy; M. de Montrichard, for instance. [*She sits down*]

GENEVIÈVE. [*Smiling*] He must have an extraordinary stomach!

PAULINE. How clever he is and how gay!

GENEVIÈVE. He *is* amusing.

PAULINE. And brave! He would make a woman very happy.

GENEVIÈVE. You say that as if Henri weren't making you happy?

PAULINE. I am very happy, and Henri is charming to me. Only, Mme. de Montrichard would have no occasion to envy me. I should like to see you that woman.

GENEVIÈVE. Me?

PAULINE. Haven't you noticed what marked attention he pays you?

GENEVIÈVE. No. Did he tell you — ?

PAULINE. What?

GENEVIÈVE. That he's paying attention to me?

PAULINE. I observed that myself; it's as clear as day. He is in love with you.

GENEVIÈVE. Are *you* interested in him?

PAULINE. Yes — because I love *you*.

GENEVIÈVE. Then be good enough to ask him to stop.

PAULINE. Why? Don't you like him?

GENEVIÈVE. [*Nervously*] No more than I do anyone else. I'm never going to marry.

PAULINE. [*Rising*] I'm surprised. I didn't think your religious devotion went so far as to eliminate marriage?

GENEVIÈVE. It isn't a matter of religion — it's only an idea of mine.

PAULINE. Then you love someone you cannot marry?

GENEVIÈVE. I love no' one —

PAULINE. You are blushing. [*Drawing GENEVIÈVE to her*]
Now, Geneviève, confide in me — am I not your friend?

GENEVIÈVE. I tell you, I don't love anyone.

PAULINE. Then you *did* love someone?

GENEVIÈVE. Let's not talk about it, please. [*Leaving*
PAULINE] I can't. [*She goes to the sofa*]

PAULINE. I understand! [*To herself*] So much the
better for Montrichard! [*To GENEVIÈVE*] My dear, M. de
Montrichard is not a man who cannot forgive a youthful slip.
[*She goes to GENEVIÈVE again*]

GENEVIÈVE. A youthful slip?

PAULINE. He's the ideal husband for you. He'll never
inquire into your past life, and if anyone should ever make the
slightest allusion to —

GENEVIÈVE. To what?

PAULINE. What you don't dare tell me — But don't blush,
dear! [*She makes GENEVIÈVE sit down*] What young girl
hasn't been imprudent once in her life? You meet a handsome
young man at a dance; he squeezes your hand; then perhaps
you answer a note of his — [*GENEVIÈVE starts to get up again,*
but PAULINE detains her] and all in the most innocent possible
way. Then you find you're compromised, without ever having
done anything actually wrong.

GENEVIÈVE. Note? Compromised? I?

PAULINE. Then what do you mean by saying you ought not
to marry?

GENEVIÈVE. [*Rising, with dignity*] I mean, Madame, that
there is a man whom I have been brought up to regard as my
future husband, and — But you wouldn't understand! You
could suspect — ! [*She turns her back to PAULINE*]

PAULINE. I am sorry if I hurt you, dear, but your reticence
certainly led me to suppose — and you know I was only trying
to be friendly!

GENEVIÈVE. [*Giving PAULINE her hand*] I was wrong!

PAULINE. Now, be brave. There was a man, you say,

whom you were brought up to regard as your future husband ——?

GENEVIÈVE. I gave all I could — respect and submission — to this fiancé. I tried to think and act as he did. I was his companion in my secret thoughts — I — oh, I can't tell you ——! Now I feel like a widow.

PAULINE. He's not dead?

GENEVIÈVE. Dead to me — he is married.

PAULINE. There's no telling what men will do!

GENEVIÈVE. He hardly knew me. He met a woman who was worthy of him, and married her — and he was right.

PAULINE. Then you should follow his example.

GENEVIÈVE. With me it's different.

PAULINE. Do you still love him?

GENEVIÈVE. Even if I once loved him, I should have no right to do so now; his heart belongs to another woman.

PAULINE. I don't quite follow your subtle reasoning ——

GENEVIÈVE. It's simply a matter of keys. [*They rise*] A husband should be able to open every drawer belonging to his wife, should he not?

PAULINE. Of course.

GENEVIÈVE. Here is a little gold key which I should have to keep from my husband.

PAULINE. What does it open?

GENEVIÈVE. An ebony box containing my diary.

PAULINE. Your diary?

GENEVIÈVE. Yes. My grandmother taught me, ever since the time I was a little child, to write down what I did and thought!

PAULINE. How queer!

GENEVIÈVE. It's a very good thing to look into one's heart every day. If there are any weeds, it's easy to pluck them out before they take root.

PAULINE. Away with dog's-grass, eh? And so you wrote down day by day this romance of yours? Metaphorically speaking, that is the key to your heart?

GENEVIÈVE. Exactly.

PAULINE. You may as well make up your mind that some day someone will steal it.

GENEVIÈVE. In any event, it will not be M. de Montrichard.

PAULINE. So much the worse for him — and you!

A servant enters.

SERVANT. M. de Beauséjour. [*He goes out*]

GENEVIÈVE. And still less *he*! I can't bear him, the smooth, bragging — ! I'm going to dress. [*She goes out*]

BAUDEL comes in.

BAUDEL. I hope I'm not driving anyone away?

PAULINE. My cousin.

BAUDEL. I should regret it were I able to regret anything in your presence, Countess!

PAULINE. [*Going to get a small hand-mirror which lies on a console-table, to the right, and then motioning BAUDEL to a chair*] Very gallant of you, I'm sure!

BAUDEL. [*To himself*] Alone, strange to say! Let us follow de Montrichard's advice, and may Buckingham preserve me! [*He brings a chair close to PAULINE*]

PAULINE. [*Sitting on the sofa*] Is M. de Montrichard sick, that we see Pylades alone?

BAUDEL. [*Sitting down*] No, Madame, he is not. He will himself come to present his respects.

PAULINE. Do you know, your friendship is worthy the age of chivalry?

BAUDEL. Cemented in our blood! I owe Montrichard a little revenge, and I shall soon pay my debt!

PAULINE. What? Old friends like you?

BAUDEL. What can I do? He's absurd; he gets on my nerves! Think of it, he persists in noticing your resemblance to — !

PAULINE. [*Looking at herself in the mirror*] That poor

girl who died in California. Yes, I know. Don't you agree with him?

BAUDEL. I confess there is something — she resembled you as the goose resembles the swan.

PAULINE. She would thank you for that!

BAUDEL. She lacked that grace, that distinction, that eminently aristocratic air — !

PAULINE. Yet Montrichard says we might be taken for sisters.

BAUDEL. Your homely sister, perhaps! ¹ [*He laughs*]

PAULINE. Clever! But you're not at all gallant toward the woman you once loved — you did once love Olympe, didn't you?

BAUDEL. Not in the least, but she was wild about me!

PAULINE. Really?

BAUDEL. I had the devil of a time making her listen to reason; she swore she was going to asphyxiate herself.

PAULINE. Is it possible? Perhaps it was because of you that she went to California?

BAUDEL. [*Rising*] I am afraid so. Such is life: we love those who do not love us, and do not love those who love us. You are now taking revenge for that poor creature, Mme. la Comtesse.

PAULINE. I thought I had forbidden that topic?

BAUDEL. What then shall I talk about?

PAULINE. [*Laying the mirror on the sofa*] Anything else. What did you think of the affair last night?

BAUDEL. Charming.

PAULINE. Take care, I'm laying a trap: I'm going to put your judgment to the test. What did you think of my neighbour?

BAUDEL. Which?

PAULINE. The slim lady to my right, with a head like an ostrich's — whose feet stuck out so from under her dress?

¹ An untranslatable pun on "Soeur de laid" — homely sister — and "Soeur de lait" — foster-sister.

BAUDEL. That's not kind of you. Well, one would have to be the devil of a naturalist to class her as mammiferous.

PAULINE. Not bad. And the mistress of the house, with all her diamonds?

BAUDEL. I thought the diamonds superb.

PAULINE. Like her teeth: half of them false! [*She rises*]

BAUDEL. [*To himself*] What a change in her! [*To PAULINE*] You are a connoisseur, then, Countess?

PAULINE. Every woman is an amateur jewel connoisseur.

BAUDEL. Will you then kindly give me your opinion on this trifle?

He takes a jewel-case from his pocket and opens it.

PAULINE. Very beautiful. That pearl on the clasp is magnificent. But what are you doing with such a river of jewels? ¹

BAUDEL. Making it flow — at the feet of — the feet of —

PAULINE. Some danseuse, I'll wager.

BAUDEL. At the feet of — the most deserving.

PAULINE. How lucky she is!

She holds up the necklace so that it sparkles.

BAUDEL. [*To himself*] She does look like Olympe!

PAULINE. You're a bad boy.

BAUDEL. Blame no one but yourself, Madame! ²

PAULINE. You are too clever. This necklace looks a trifle tight.

BAUDEL. Do you think so?

PAULINE. Yes — see! [*She takes it from the box, then gets the mirror.* BAUDEL, who has taken the box, lays it on the table and returns to PAULINE, who hands him the mirror. *She then puts on the necklace*] No, it's plenty large enough. [*To herself, as she looks at herself in the glass*] How it shows off the complexion!

¹ "Rivière" means necklace.

² Still another pun; Pauline calls Baudel "a bad subject," and he replies that "bad sovereigns make bad subjects."

BAUDEL. [*Aside*] Montrichard was right; great ladies are as fond of jewels as the others are. What he knows about women — I! Now — I — a Countess's lover — that will certainly send me up in the world!

PAULINE. [*Unclasping the necklace*] Take your diamonds to your danseuse now!

BAUDEL. After they have touched your neck? It would be the vilest profanation!

PAULINE. Then what are you going to do with them?

BAUDEL. I shall keep them as a souvenir.

PAULINE. No, no, I wouldn't allow that.

BAUDEL. Then, Countess, there is but one thing to do: keep them yourself as a souvenir of me, since you object to my having one of you.

PAULINE. You're out of your senses! Are such things possible?

BAUDEL. Why ask? It's very simple. Would you not accept a bouquet of flowers? Diamonds are flowers — which last a long time — that is all.

PAULINE. Do you think my husband would look at it in that light?

BAUDEL. [*Laying the box on the table at the right*] You might tell him that they're paste.

PAULINE. [*To herself*] I never thought of that! What a fool I am; I forget that I have a hundred thousand francs income! [*To BAUDEL*] Let's not joke about it any longer, Monsieur. Take this back to the jeweller — that will be best. [*She gives him the necklace*]

[HENRI enters]

BAUDEL. [*To himself*] Her husband, eh? [*To HENRI*] How are you, M. le Comte? You're just in time to clear up a mystery of which I am the victim.

HENRI. What is the mystery, Monsieur?

BAUDEL. Madame is trying to persuade me that these diamonds are only paste. [*He hands HENRI the necklace.*]

PAULINE. [*To herself*] Who would have thought it of him?

HENRI. I am no judge. [*To the Countess.*] Did you buy this, Madame?

PAULINE. Yes, because of the setting.—It's an old one.—Quite a bargain.

BAUDEL. I confess my ignorance, Madame, and I promise to keep the secret of the marvellous paste diamonds. It will be to my credit that others are deceived by them. Are you going to wear it tonight at Mme. de Ransberg's?

HENRI. Are you dining there, Monsieur?

BAUDEL. No, M. le Comte, but Montrichard is going to introduce me at the soirée afterward. I hope to make up at that time for not having seen you now, for I must go — [*Bowing.*] Mme. la Comtesse! M. le Comte! [*To himself.*] Things are going beautifully! [*He goes out.*]

HENRI. You have one great fault, Pauline: duplicity — and you don't scruple to act on every occasion —

PAULINE. I don't see —?

HENRI. Couldn't you tell me frankly if you wanted diamonds?

PAULINE. [*To herself*] Water seeks the river — certainly in this case.¹

HENRI. I never refused you anything reasonable. As you are going into society, I realize you must have jewels, and if I have given you none so far, it was because I had not thought about it. But I repeat, I dislike this underhanded business.

He gives her the necklace.

PAULINE. [*Taking it*] I beg your pardon, dear. It was really so small a matter that I was ashamed to speak of it.

HENRI. How much do you need for other jewels?

PAULINE. Didn't your mother have a jewel-box?

HENRI. Yes.

PAULINE. Well?

HENRI. Her diamonds became sacred objects when she

¹ See footnote, p. 33.

died: they are not jewels, but remembrances. [*He goes to the left*] Suppose I allow you fifty thousand francs? Is that enough?

PAULINE. Thank you. [*A pause*]

HENRI. [*Returning*] Has my aunt gone out yet?

PAULINE. Yes, with your uncle. May I ask where *you* have just come from?

HENRI. A walk in the country.

PAULINE. In those clothes?

HENRI. No, I changed them when I came back.

PAULINE. [*Going to HENRI*] Why didn't you take me?

HENRI. You don't like walking — you prefer driving in the fashionable streets.

PAULINE. But the country must be lovely!

HENRI. It is.

PAULINE. In all the melancholy splendour of autumn!

HENRI. What dress are you going to wear to-night? [*He goes to the fireplace*]

PAULINE. Henry, you are vexed with me about something? What is it?

HENRI. What?

PAULINE. I ask you — evidently there is something. I have surely done nothing — have I given you reason to complain?

HENRI. Have I given you any cause to be offended?

PAULINE. The idea!

HENRI. Please, Madame, let us leave these petty family quarrels to the lower classes! You are too dignified to stoop to that.

PAULINE. I see: those awful suspicions are troubling you again!

HENRI. I have no suspicions.

PAULINE. You mean you are sure. Tell me, Henri; my conscience is perfectly clear, and I demand an explanation.

HENRI. No use, Madame, you will never have occasion to complain of my attitude.

PAULINE. That's complete estrangement, then! Do you think for one moment I'll accept that?

HENRI. What difference does it make to you?

PAULINE. Now, Henri, for the love of Heaven! Our happiness is at stake, don't you see? Let us both be frank. I'll set you an example: yes, in bringing you to Pilnitz, I knew we should meet your uncle.

HENRI. His secretary did tell me of a letter you had written him —

PAULINE. [*To herself*] I thought so!

HENRI. But I didn't believe that: you promised me you didn't know — you swore on your mother's soul.

PAULINE. I would have sworn on the soul of my own child, if I had had one, because you are dearer to me than the whole world, and my first duty is to make you happy! I wanted to bring you back into your proper surroundings again, and allow you to breathe the air that is natural to you — that was my only crime.

HENRI. I appreciate what you have done.

PAULINE. But the way you say it! Do you for one moment imagine that I was prompted by personal pride — that I wanted to play a part in society, and masquerade as a great society belle? An empty rôle, dear, and I am only too ready to relinquish it.

HENRI. I can believe it!

PAULINE. This artificial existence bores me.

HENRI. [*Sitting down*] I know.

PAULINE. Then what do you accuse me of?

HENRI. Nothing. [*He goes to the right of the table and sits down again*]

PAULINE. [*Sitting by him on a little table*] Come, Monsieur, you mustn't scowl! Kiss your wife, who loves only you. [*She offers her forehead; HENRI touches it with his lips*] Do you object to my little trick for getting the necklace? Don't scold me — I don't deserve it. I'm not going to society affairs any more. Then, that matter of your mother's jewels — that

was tactless, indelicate of me. I should have realised that a saint's relics should belong only to an angel. Keep them, preserve them religiously, and if Heaven grants us the blessing of a daughter —

HENRI. [*Violently, as he rises*] You — a daughter! She might resemble you!

PAULINE. Henri! [*She tries to stand up, but he forces her back to her place*]

HENRI. Don't say a word! Let us have no more of this ridiculous farce! I know you only too well! All that virtue you assume so cleverly, your unselfishness, love, repentance — the whole thing has fallen from you like a load, like thick paint — in the warm atmosphere of this family circle! I can see! I am no longer the child you seduced!

PAULINE. [*Standing up*] You grow younger, my dear: you had reached years of discretion when you married me.

HENRI. [*Sadly*] Twenty-two! I had just lost my father, a man whose severity kept me a child when I should have been a young man. You were my first mistress — I knew nothing of life, except what you taught me. I wasn't hard to deceive; I made an easy rung in the ladder of your ambition.

PAULINE. My ambition? Ha, how far has it gone? I'm really surprised at you! You might think I had lived a gay and merry life with you, alone for a year!

HENRI. You may well regret all the wasted hours, after what I have just found out. The society our family moves in is not exactly what you had expected, I know, and *your* disappointment has opened my eyes. You feel that this is not quite your place — you feel ill at ease, out of your natural element; you cannot forgive the real society ladies for the superiority of their manners and their breeding —. [PAULINE *is about to speak*] I can see how bitter you are from every word you speak. You cannot understand the true worth or the essential goodness of this family. You are bored, and as out of place — unrepentant sinner in church —

PAULINE. [*Sharply*] That will do! You don't love me.

in other words. There is only one thing to do: separate — on friendly terms.

HENRI. Separate? Never.

PAULINE. Are you doing me the honour to want my company?

HENRI. You bear my name, Madame, and I shall not allow it to be dragged in the gutter. [*A pause ensues*] Now let us quietly accept the result of our act. We are bound together: let us walk side by side, and try not to hate each other.

PAULINE. You will find that difficult.

HENRI. Never fear: if I cannot forget how you became Countess de Puygiron, I shall never lose sight of that fact that you are she. Now, I have already shown you too much of what I feel — this explanation is at an end. Let us do our best to keep up appearances.

PAULINE. A nice life to look forward to, isn't it?

GENEVIÈVE *enters in evening dress.*

GENEVIÈVE. Pauline, aren't you going to dress? They're coming for us soon.

PAULINE. I forgot — I was talking with Henri. I'll hurry, though. [*She starts to go*] Scold your cousin, dear; she wants to be an old maid!

GENEVIÈVE. Pauline!

PAULINE. Henri is another edition of myself. She wants to remain an old maid in order to be faithful to a childhood husband who deserted her — for three dolls!

HENRI. [*Troubled*] Geneviève —?

GENEVIÈVE. I don't know what she means?

PAULINE. [*To herself*] How troubled they are!

HENRI. [*To PAULINE*] You'll never be ready in time!

PAULINE. [*To herself*] Ha, is *he* the childhood husband? I'll soon find out! [*A gesture from HENRI*] I'm going. You'll talk sense to her, won't you? [*She goes out*]

GENEVIÈVE. Pauline doesn't know what she's talking about.

She can't imagine a girl's not wanting to marry without there being some mystery.

HENRI. Is it true that you don't intend to marry?

GENEVIÈVE. I don't exactly know, but I'm not prejudiced against marriage. I consider it the basis of home-life, if not a religion in itself, and I should be too proud to accept a master who would not be a god for me.

HENRI. You are right, Geneviève: wait for a man who is worthy of you.

GENEVIÈVE. My grand-parents have given me so splendid an example of married life that I'd rather a thousand times go into a convent than marry for the sake of convenience, or because it's the thing to do. Rather than accept the first man who happens along —

HENRI. The worst misfortune that can befall a human being is an uncongenial marriage.

GENEVIÈVE. And I'm so happy here — my people are so good to me! The man who takes me from my home will seem like a stranger — it would be like leaving a temple for an inn.

HENRI. [*To himself*] Here was my happiness! So near at hand! [*He turns aside, putting his hand over his eyes*]

GENEVIÈVE. What are you thinking of?

HENRI. Nothing; I was looking at that portrait. [*He indicates the MARQUISE' portrait, over the fireplace*]

GENEVIÈVE. It seems to keep watch! How comforting it is! I feel that the whole house is protected by it.

HENRI. [*To himself, as he looks at the portrait*] She would have been my mother! [*A servant enters, announces Madame Morin and goes out*] Madame Morin?

IRMA comes in.

IRMA. Where is she? Where is my daughter? — How are you, son-in-law?

GENEVIÈVE. How glad Pauline will be!

IRMA. Where is she?

GENEVIÈVE. Dressing. Don't let her know you are here — we'll give her a surprise.

IRMA. You must be her cousin, Mademoiselle? Fine young lady, well set-up! Kiss me, will you, angel?

GENEVIÈVE. Delighted, Madame. [*She goes toward IRMA, but HENRI quickly steps between the two*]

HENRI. To what do I owe the pleasure of seeing you, Madame?

IRMA. My maternal affection. [*A carriage is heard outside*]

GENEVIÈVE. Grandfather's coming. I'll tell him you're here. [*She goes out*]

HENRI. What do you want?

IRMA. Well — have I a daughter or haven't I?

HENRI. You haven't any longer. She is dead to you: you have inherited everything she possessed.

IRMA. My dear, that inheritance has taken wings! I've speculated.

HENRI. I see. How much will you take to go?

IRMA. Heavens! He wants to buy a mother's love!

HENRI. I'll give you an income of fifteen hundred francs.

IRMA. I must have my daughter.

HENRI. Three thousand.

IRMA. You poor boy!

HENRI. Come, Madame, they'll be here shortly. Tell me how much you'll take.

IRMA. Five thousand.

HENRI. Very well. But you leave tomorrow morning?

IRMA. All right.

HENRI. Sh! Here's my uncle.

The MARQUIS comes in.

MARQUIS. I am very glad to see you, Mme. Morin.

IRMA. M. le Marquis, the honour is mine.

MARQUIS. As the mother of a charming daughter! True!

IRMA. Excuse my travelling clothes — I should have fixed up a little, but I so wanted to see my girl!

MARQUIS. Very natural, but your Breton costume would have been dear to the eyes of an old Chouan. It was very wrong of you not to wear it.

HENRI. [*To IRMA*] Pretend to understand!

IRMA. Oh, one can't travel in such a costume.

MARQUIS. [*To HENRI*] She looks like a clothes-dealer — but your wife will see to that. [*Aloud*] Will you see that Madame's room is made ready?

IRMA. A thousand thanks, M. le Marquis, but I'm only passing through the city. I must leave for Dantzic tomorrow morning.

MARQUIS. And why must you go to Dantzic so soon?

IRMA. To collect a debt of a hundred thousand francs. I'll lose it if I don't go tomorrow. Ask my son-in-law.

HENRI. That's so.

MARQUIS. Then I have nothing further to say. But you will see us on your return?

IRMA. You are too good, M. le marquis.

MARQUIS. I should like to know you better. We'll talk about Brittany — in Breton.

IRMA. [*To herself*] Good Lord!

HENRI. I think it's time to go to Mme. de Ransberg's, Uncle. Pauline may stay with her mother: it will be an excellent excuse.

MARQUIS. Very true.

The MARQUISE and GENEVIÈVE enter.

MARQUISE. You are very welcome, Madame.

MARQUIS. My wife — Madame Morin.

IRMA. [*Confused*] Madame — I — this honour —

MARQUISE. You find your daughter surrounded here only by friends, Madame.

IRMA. Oh, of course — Madame — Madame is too good!

PAULINE *enters in evening dress, wearing the necklace.*

PAULINE. Are you ready?

MARQUIS. You won't have to go, dear.

PAULINE. Why? [GENEVIÈVE takes her hand and conducts her to IRMA] Mother! [She steps back, looking nervously at the MARQUIS]

IRMA. Yes, dearie, it's me!

MARQUIS. [To the MARQUISE] We're in the way here. — We are now obliged to leave you, Madame; we are dining out.

MARQUISE. We should be very sorry, Madame, to be in the way — you must want to give free rein to your feelings.

IRMA. Oh, I — please —

GENEVIÈVE. [To PAULINE] What lovely diamonds!

MARQUIS. Well, well, Henri is gallant!

PAULINE. They're only paste — I just thought it would be amusing to have them!

MARQUISE. Marvellous imitation — that pearl especially! But, my dear, the Countess de Puygiron should never wear artificial pearls! — Good evening, Madame.

She takes HENRI'S arm, GENEVIÈVE takes that of the MARQUIS, and they go out. It begins to grow dark. PAULINE waits a moment until the others are out of hearing.

PAULINE. Oh, Mother, how glad I am to see you! [She kisses her] What is going on in Paris? How is Céleste? And Clémence? And Taffétas? Ernest? Jules? Contran? And how was the ballet at the Opéra? And the Maison d'Or? And the Mont-de-Piété?

IRMA. Oh, my!

PAULINE. I've been dying to know for a whole year! Let me take off my corsets! God, it's fine to talk with you, mother, for a minute!

IRMA. Pauline's herself again! I knew all this greatness wouldn't change you. You're always the same.

PAULINE. More than ever. Did the news of my death make much of a stir in Paris?

IRMA. I should say it did! What a lot of people went to

your funeral! More than to La Fayette's! I was awfully proud to be your mother — take my word for it!

PAULINE. Poor dear! But here I am rattling along — maybe you'd like something to eat?

IRMA. Give me some fruit — fresh. It's six o'clock.

PAULINE. I forgot — happiness of seeing you! [*She rings*]

IRMA. I'm all excited!

A servant enters.

IRMA *takes off her hat and cloak.*

PAULINE. Lay places for two. [*To IRMA*] Shall we eat here?

IRMA. Suits me down to the ground.

PAULINE. [*To the servant, severely*] You hear? And don't take an hour for it, either!

SERVANT. [*To himself*] As if I were a dog! [*He goes out*]

PAULINE. [*Returning to IRMA*] What did the girls think of my trick?

IRMA. They were all jealous of the gorgeous funeral. Clémence threw herself into my arms and cried: "The ideal Oh, my!"

PAULINE. Poor creature! Who's she with now?

IRMA. Don't talk about it! She's got better luck than an honest woman! A fine general: fifteen thousand a year!

PAULINE. I was a bigger fool than she! [*The servant brings a table and sets it*]

IRMA. Aren't you happy?

Enter ADOLPHE.

ADOLPHE. I beg your pardon, Mme. la comtesse, for the liberty I am taking of —

PAULINE. Be seated, Monsieur.

The servant brings in the dessert.

ADOLPHE. The day after tomorrow our theatre is to give a performance for my benefit, and I thought that as a compatriot,

you would be glad to take a box. Will you be so good as to accept this?

He gives a ticket to MONTRICHARD, who has entered meanwhile, and who hands it to PAULINE.

PAULINE. Many thanks, Monsieur. I am told that you do impersonations?

ADOLPHE. Yes, Madame, I owe my success in a foreign country to that.

PAULINE. If you are not occupied this evening, we should be delighted to hear you.

ADOLPHE. Charmed, Madame.

PAULINE. [*To the servant*] Bring me another glass, and then go. [*The glass is brought and filled with wine*] Here, M. Adolphe, drink this.

ADOLPHE. Thank you, Madame, but champagne does not agree with me.

IRMA. It's *Cliquot*, old man; you can't get drunk on that. Here's to you!

ADOLPHE. [*After drinking*] It's good!

IRMA. [*Pouring out another glassful for him*] Say, little one, you squint, don't you?

ADOLPHE. Yes, Madame, that squint was what induced me to go into comic impersonation.

MONTRICHARD. And is to give us the pleasure of hearing you! [*ADOLPHE drinks*]

PAULINE. Sing us a song, M. Adolphe.

ADOLPHE. *Le Petit cochon de Barbarie*? [*IRMA again fills his glass*]

PAULINE. No, a student song!

ADOLPHE. I don't know any.

MONTRICHARD. But you look as if you'd been a notary's clerk?

ADOLPHE. I have, Monsieur.

PAULINE. You have?

ADOLPHE. Yes, I come of a good family, Madame; my

father was one of the biggest hardware merchants in Paris. He wanted me to go into the law, but an irresistible sense of vocation drove me to the boards. [*He drinks*]

MONTRICHARD. Your father must have been very angry?

ADOLPHE. He even refused to allow me to use his name—said I was soiling it by dragging it before the footlights.

PAULINE. What *is* his name?

ADOLPHE. Mathieu.

MONTRICHARD. It would have been downright sacrilege!

IRMA. Here's to you, then, son of Mathieu! I like you! You're not handsome and you're something of a fool, but you're nice and simple!

ADOLPHE. [*Displeased*] Madame!

IRMA. Now you mustn't be angry, little one! I was only joking! [*She rises, holding a bottle in one hand and a glass in the other*] You're good looking, good looking — between squints!

PAULINE. Come now, let's put our elbows on the table and say foolish things! Why, I can almost imagine myself at the *Provençaux* — I'm born again!

MONTRICHARD. [*To himself*] Homesickness for the mud!

IRMA. Can't see decently in here! And I don't like to say foolish things in the dark! [*She hands the bottle to ADOLPHE*]

MONTRICHARD. Someone'll get wounded!

PAULINE. [*Taking a candle from the table and putting it in one of the candelabra*] Let's light all the candles! Help me, Montrichard.

MONTRICHARD. I don't know how many there are — but before long Irma's going to see thirty-six.

ADOLPHE. Well, I see fifteen. [*PAULINE and MONTRICHARD stand on chairs at either side of the fireplace and light the large candelabra between which hangs the portrait*]

IRMA. A picture? What is it?

PAULINE. A barometer.

IRMA. That barometer looks to me like an old lady.

MONTRICHARD. [*To PAULINE*] Hm! What if she should come in now?

PAULINE. Let them all come! They can send me to the devil with their five hundred thousand francs, if they like!

ADOLPHE. [*Who has taken MONTRICHARD'S place*] I'd like to suggest a toast.

IRMA. [*Coming down-stage on the right*] Go ahead, but try to be respectable.

MONTRICHARD. Wait for us. [*Near the table*] We're listening.

ADOLPHE. To that enchanting sex which is the charm and torment of our existence — in a word: the ladies!

MONTRICHARD. You *are* rather forward, M. Adolphe!

IRMA. I call it *risqué!*

PAULINE. Comes from a fortunate man, evidently.

ADOLPHE. Yes, Madame —

MONTRICHARD. You must have all sorts of affairs, a man like you, so exposed in the theatre —

ADOLPHE. [*Fatuously*] I must admit that opportunities are not lacking.

MONTRICHARD. Then what is, for the love of Heaven?

ADOLPHE. I'm a respectable man: I'm married.

PAULINE. A very grave fault — you must try to redeem yourself.

IRMA. And look after your wife! Take my advice!

ADOLPHE. I beg you, respect the mother of my children!

MONTRICHARD. Oh, Adolphe, hast thou children?

ADOLPHE. Three: all my living image!

PAULINE. I pity the youngest.

ADOLPHE. Why?

PAULINE. He has the longest time during which to resemble you!

MONTRICHARD. All children begin by looking like papa, and end by resembling their father!

IRMA. "The voice of blood" is a prejudice.

PAULINE. [*Raising her glass*] Down with prejudices! Down with the family! Down with marriage! Down with the marquis!

MONTRICHARD. Down with hardware merchants!

ADOLPHE. Down with hardware merchants!

IRMA. Long live us!

PAULINE. [*Singing*]:

When you haven't any money
And you write to your dad,
And he answers, "Don't get funny;
Don't make love on my cash, lad;
You can't make love on that,
And turn night into day ——"

All join in the refrain, clinking their knives on the glasses. ADOLPHE falls from his chair, and IRMA gradually dozes.

MONTRICHARD. [*To himself*] And to think of all she did in order to become a countess!

PAULINE. [*Dreamily*] The dear old songs of my youth! Those lovely old dresses and scarves I used to wear! The dances at the *Chaumière*—dinner at the *Moulin-Rouge*—the old mill I used to throw my hat over! I can see a young girl living in an attic; one day she runs off over the fields to meet her lover for the first time. And the sun! "Open the door, please!"

IRMA. [*Half-asleep*] Ah!

MONTRICHARD. [*To himself*] I thought so!

ADOLPHE. [*Rising, quite drunk*] I tell you — I'm not bad-looking!

PAULINE. Then you're a blackguardly imposter! Take off your false nose and your china eyes!

MONTRICHARD. Take off his head, while we're about it!

ADOLPHE. My wife thinks I'm very distinguished looking.

PAULINE. She's unfaithful to you!

ADOLPHE. Oh, if I thought so ——!

MONTRICHARD. You may be sure she isn't, old man! You should never doubt your wife!

ADOLPHE. Would you swear it on the head of this respectable lady?

MONTRICHARD. Lend me your head, Irma; I should like to oblige this gentleman.

ADOLPHE. [*Sobbing*] How unhappy I am! She's deceiving me, I know —!

PAULINE. How about your good looks, now, you fool?

IRMA. There's a fine comedian for you!

ADOLPHE. [*Falling into IRMA'S arms*] You, my mother, you understand me!

IRMA. [*Repulsing him*] Here now, you fool! Tell us something funny; you came here to make us laugh.

ADOLPHE. That's right — well — a baptism song! [*He sings*]:

Little Léon, on his mother's breast
Was never unhappy —

[*He stops, sobbing again*] My poor children! they are unhappy

PAULINE. What? Your children?

ADOLPHE. I bought my wife a cake yesterday, and I haven't paid the baker yet! [*He falls down into his chair*]

MONTRICHARD. [*To himself*] Poor devil!

IRMA. Look, Minette, he's a good-hearted fellow. He's ruining himself for women.

PAULINE. Don't cry, baby, we won't send you away empty-handed! Montrichard, give him my purse.

MONTRICHARD. [*To PAULINE*] Charity will be your ruin. [*Giving ADOLPHE the purse*] Here you are, old man.

ADOLPHE. [*Rejecting it*] No. Monsieur, no — I receive money only from my manager — when he gives it to me. This would be charity. Thank you, I come of a good family!

PAULINE. I feel so sorry for him. I don't like to see misery at such close quarters.

IRMA. If he's proud, it's his own loss!

PAULINE. What can I make him accept? [*She quickly takes the pearl from her necklace and gives it to ADOLPHE*] Here, baby, here's a little trinket for your wife. You can't refuse that.

ADOLPHE. You are very kind, Mme. la Comtesse. [*He kisses her hand*]

PAULINE. It's late — you must go home now. Take him to the door, Montrichard. [*IRMA fills ADOLPHE'S pockets with the remains of the dessert*]

MONTRICHARD. Take my arm, M. Adolphe. [*To himself*] Olympe is herself again! God knows where she'll end now!

ADOLPHE. [*To PAULINE*] You're an angel. [*To IRMA*] You're both angels.

MONTRICHARD. Don't say that! They won't believe you!

ADOLPHE. [*To MONTRICHARD*] So are you!

MONTRICHARD. Of course I am. So are you — an impossible angel. Come now, son of Mathieu! [*They go out*]

IRMA. [*Yawning and stretching herself*] What an idea! To give him an artificial pearl!

PAULINE. Artificial? It's worth at least a thousand francs.

IRMA. [*Sitting up*] A thousand francs? Are you crazy?

PAULINE. What of it? I didn't have anything else handy. [*Brooding for an instant*] It will bring me luck! My separation will be a success!

IRMA. Got a pack of cards around here?

PAULINE. [*Taking a candelabrum and going toward the door leading to her room*] Not here, but I have in my room. Why?

IRMA. [*Following her*] I want to try — see how you'll succeed.

PAULINE. Do you still believe in card-tricks?

IRMA. Do I? That's the only thing that's dead certain!

PAULINE. Nonsense!

IRMA. Stop it! You'll come to some bad end if you don't believe in something.

PAULINE. I rely on myself. [*Taking up the candelabrum which she had set down*]

IRMA. You're right; we must help ourselves; then Heaven will help us.

PAULINE. Yes, Heaven!

IRMA. Figuratively speaking. Now for the cards!

PAULINE. My separation!

They go out at the left. As IRMA passes the MARQUISE' portrait, she bows ceremoniously to it.

ACT III

The scene is the same as that of the preceding act. MONTRICHARD and a servant are present.

SERVANT. Mme. la Comtesse asks M. le Baron to be good enough to wait a moment for her. Here are the newspapers.
[*He goes out*]

MONTRICHARD. Do I arrive in the midst of a crisis? Hardly tactful, but what's the odds? If I don't succeed in marrying this lady, I can easily find another. Now I am really quite a catch. But then why should I marry at all?

PAULINE *comes in*.

PAULINE. How are you, M. de Corbeau?¹

MONTRICHARD. Do I seem handsome² to you?

PAULINE. As everything does which one is on the point of losing?

MONTRICHARD. Oh, have I been fortunate enough to cause you some anxiety, Mme. la Comtesse?

PAULINE. Even sleeplessness — or rather, nightmares. How inconsiderate of you to stay at Homburg for a week without writing a line! I dreamed of you as having lost every sou, and your head was bound up in bloody bandages!

MONTRICHARD. And you shed a tear for me? Mourned by Olympe — what an occasion for a beautiful death! I've always missed the exact occasion. Far from blowing out my brains, I blew up the bank!³

¹ Literally, "crow," used in the sense of "vulture."

² A pun on "beau" — handsome — and "corbeau."

³ A pun on "sauter la cervelle" and "sauter la banque."

PAULINE. Really?

MONTRICHARD. As really as I have the honour to announce the news to you.

PAULINE. [*Enthusiastically*] What a man! And what luck! And you wonder why women love and admire you! If you were only willing, it wouldn't be that fool Baudel who'd abduct me ——!

MONTRICHARD. It would be that ass Montrichard — but you would be a greater fool than he!

PAULINE. [*Laughing*] That's true enough.

MONTRICHARD. What is this joke about the abduction?

PAULINE. It's a very serious matter. I have made up my mind to kick over the traces, and I've chosen M. de Beauséjour as my accomplice.

MONTRICHARD. But I was told at his rooms this morning that he went away last night?

PAULINE. Yes — to Nice.

MONTRICHARD. But why without you?

PAULINE. I remain to negotiate with the honourable family for an amicable separation.

MONTRICHARD. Which you hope to obtain?

PAULINE. Which I am sure to obtain. There is an element of chance, because I intend to impose my own conditions; but since yesterday I have found very persuasive arguments, and I assure you everything will be arranged. They thought that when I entered their family I dishonoured it! Watch my exit!

MONTRICHARD. But why didn't Baudel wait for you?

PAULINE. First, I wanted to get some precious possessions safe out of the way. He took them with him.

MONTRICHARD. Your diamonds?

PAULINE. Other things, too. Then he must find a place for me to stay. Do you think I want to stop at a hotel? I'm tired of this life of the past eighteen months. I'm going to make up for lost time, make no mistake about that!

MONTRICHARD. Poor Baudel! Be a good girl, now, Countess, and don't ruin the boy!

PAULINE. He will get just what he deserves, he, the prince of fools!

MONTRICHARD. But he's a dear child.

PAULINE. Think so? Do you know, he had the audacity to claim that he'd once been Olympe Taverny's lover?

MONTRICHARD. While as a matter of fact he only belonged to the number of those who had not?

PAULINE. Now, now —

MONTRICHARD. I beg your pardon, Countess — if I dare still call you by that name?

PAULINE. You may dare, old man; I'm not going to drop it.

MONTRICHARD. Maybe the Puygirons will drop it for you?

PAULINE. I'd rather give up my money. Their name's a gold mine, dear.

MONTRICHARD. But what if they offered some compensation?

PAULINE. They? Poor people! I don't advise them to. I tell you I *have* them!

MONTRICHARD. So tight as that?

PAULINE. Yes. I've not lost much time since you've been away: I've been working this last week.

MONTRICHARD. Oh, don't tell me —

PAULINE. You're afraid of being dragged in as an accomplice?

MONTRICHARD. I want to be nothing in all this business but a sort of good genius — and then —

PAULINE. Then? What do you mean?

MONTRICHARD. That this marriage of mine — Well, I'm not so anxious about it now.

PAULINE. What!

MONTRICHARD. I'm not ready to make a fool of myself that way until I have nothing left with which to commit more follies. Now I have cash. In the second place, I don't think the young lady is especially attracted to me. If, therefore, she were forced to take me for want of a better, she would have her

revenge on me! I should be paying dear! I'd rather she went into a convent than I!

PAULINE. I shan't insist, if you look at it in that light. And I must say the child doesn't love you — she loves someone else.

MONTRICHARD. I suspected it.

PAULINE. Do you know who that someone else is? I give you a hundred guesses. — My husband!

MONTRICHARD. Who said so? She?

PAULINE. She has no idea I know.

MONTRICHARD. How did this hopeless love take root?

PAULINE. It's not hopeless — that's the nicest part of the business. She's taken it into her head that I'm a consumptive, that I haven't more than six months to live. I don't know where she got that idea!

MONTRICHARD. [*To himself*] I wonder!

PAULINE. And she's waiting for my death with angelic serenity. That's the way with these angels! Dealers in morality! Good Lord, *we're* better than they! Don't you think so?

MONTRICHARD. Well, between the person who sets a trap and the one who allows himself to be caught there's hardly a hair's difference. So, I get off scot-free, thanks to you —

PAULINE. And now that you know how matters stand, be good enough to go away. My dressmaker is waiting for me: I must have a serious talk with her. You don't have to think hard to know I'm not going to show off on the *Promenade des Anglais* those monastic weeds that captured simple Henri's heart!

MONTRICHARD. Shall I see you again, then?

PAULINE. In this family, no, but I have a notion you'll walk into Nice some day and want to be set on your feet again.

MONTRICHARD. That reminds me! [*Taking out his pocketbook*] Will you do me a favour? Take this check on the Bank of France to Baudel. I intended to give it to him this morning as soon as he was up —

PAULINE. For fifty thousand francs? What is this?

MONTRICHARD. A loan.

PAULINE. Do you still continue to pay your debts, you overgrown child?

MONTRICHARD. None of us is perfect!

PAULINE. If I were you, Baron, I should keep that little check — for a rainy day.

MONTRICHARD. No, no, it might rain on me before it does on him, and I should be forced to use it. Let us keep our honour intact!

PAULINE. Take this back. I don't like to carry scraps of paper worth so much.

MONTRICHARD. Very well. I'll send it through the banker. Goodby, Contesina. [*He kisses her hand*]

PAULINE. Goodby, Baronino. [*He goes out*] What a queer mixture! I thought he had more backbone! Really, I think there *is* no perfect man!

GENEVIÈVE *comes in, looking for something.*

PAULINE. Good morning, Geneviève.

GENEVIÈVE. I beg your pardon, I didn't see you! How are you this morning?

PAULINE. Very well, as usual.

GENEVIÈVE. As usual!

PAULINE. Were you looking for something?

GENEVIÈVE. A little gold key I lost yesterday.

PAULINE. The key to the famous box? The key to your heart?

GENEVIÈVE. That's the one.

PAULINE. I told you someone would steal it.

GENEVIÈVE. Oh, I'll find it.

PAULINE. [*Putting on her hat*] You can find everything except lost time —

GENEVIÈVE. Are you going out?

PAULINE. To the dressmaker's.

GENEVIÈVE. Can you think of dresses —?

PAULINE. This is a happy day for me.

GENEVIÈVE. You're better, then?

PAULINE. Little Miss Obstinate, I'm as healthy as possible.

GENEVIÈVE. You said something very different the other day.

PAULINE. No matter what happens, don't forget that you've sworn never to repeat a single word of what I told you.

GENEVIÈVE. It's not fair to make me promise that — please don't keep me to it.

PAULINE. I must. If you talk too much to your grandparents about me, they're likely to want to look after my welfare a little too carefully. I couldn't remain here! Now, let's say nothing more about it.

GENEVIÈVE. But I shall at least have done all I could?

PAULINE. Yes, your conscience may be clear! See you later, angel. [*She goes out*]

GENEVIÈVE. I have an idea — but how can I open the subject with grandfather and grandmother? [*She sits down, her head resting on her hand. She is plunged in thought*] Oh, Henri! My dear Henri!

The MARQUIS and the MARQUISE come in.

MARQUIS. [*Pointing to GENEVIÈVE*] What is she thinking about? Statue of meditation!

MARQUISE. She looks very sad.

MARQUIS. Very. — What's the trouble, dear?

GENEVIÈVE. [*Startled*] I didn't know you were there!

MARQUISE. Didn't you hear us come in? What awful thought was absorbing you so?

MARQUIS. Has someone troubled you?

GENEVIÈVE. Oh, no.

MARQUISE. Do you want anything?

GENEVIÈVE. No. [*Interrupting herself*] That is —

MARQUIS. That is — yes. Come now, don't sulk — what is it?

GENEVIÈVE. I want to see Italy!

MARQUIS. What? Italy — right off, at once?

GENEVIÈVE. It's the spleen — I don't like Vienna. I'll be sick if I stay here any longer.

MARQUISE. How long have you felt this way?

GENEVIÈVE. For a long time. I didn't intend to say anything about it — I hoped I should get over the feeling. But it only gets worse. Please — take me to Rome!

MARQUIS. This isn't reasonable!

MARQUISE. Silly idea of a spoiled child!

GENEVIÈVE. No, I declare it isn't. I must make that trip. I don't usually take advantage of your kindness, do I? You don't know what it's costing me now to ask you to break in on your quiet life, your regular habits——

MARQUIS. Oh, our habits! The main consideration is that you should be happy, and it seems that you are not that here. What do you say, Madame?

MARQUISE. We are at home wherever Geneviève is happy.

GENEVIÈVE. Well, if you take me to Rome, I promise to sing like a song-bird from morning to night; you'll have me with you all day; there won't be any dances to deprive you of your granddaughter. We'll have such a good time together!

MARQUIS. All together!

GENEVIÈVE. You can teach Pauline and me whist.

MARQUIS. Is Pauline to come?

GENEVIÈVE. Of course — it's to be a family party! Every evening you'll have your little game just as you do here, only it'll be nicer. I'll be your partner and you may scold me every time I make you lose a king. Here you don't dare scold grandmother!

MARQUIS. Well, I don't say no to that. If the Marquise consents, we'll talk it over later.

GENEVIÈVE. Talk it over?

MARQUIS. We must have some time to become accustomed to the idea.

GENEVIÈVE. And you will show me Rome yourself, grand-

father. All young women go there with their husbands, who explain the sights to them. But I'd rather go with you.

MARQUISE. She's right, dear; we should take advantage of the time she is still with us.

MARQUIS. If someone had told me an hour ago that we should spend the winter in Rome I should certainly have been surprised!

GENEVIÈVE. Then you will? Oh, thank you!

MARQUISE. She's looking better already.

GENEVIÈVE. When do we leave?

MARQUIS. [*Laughing*] Give me my cane and hat.

MARQUISE. How much time will you give us to get ready?

GENEVIÈVE. I'll get ready for you — you have only to step into the carriage.

MARQUIS. Give us a week.

GENEVIÈVE. Too long. You'd have time to change your mind!

MARQUISE. Four days?

GENEVIÈVE. Three.

MARQUIS. You'll sing, you say, from morning to night?

GENEVIÈVE. And I'll play whist with you. — I'll read your paper. — I'll do anything you like! I do love you so! [*She throws herself into his arms*]

MARQUISE. Really, I like the idea of this trip. Shall we leave tomorrow?

GENEVIÈVE. I gave you three days — I'm reasonable! We must have time to persuade Pauline and Henri.

MARQUISE. I hardly think they'll object.

GENEVIÈVE. If they do — well, you're the head of the family, grandfather; use your authority.

MARQUIS. It seems to me that you are the head of the family!

GENEVIÈVE. I warn you now that if Pauline doesn't come with us, I shan't go. If you're anxious for the trip you must induce her to come, too.

MARQUIS. Very well, Mademoiselle, I shall make use of my

authority. [*To the MARQUISE*] When we have great-grandchildren, they'll make us walk about on all fours!

A servant enters.

SERVANT. This gentleman [*showing card*] would like to see M. le Marquis.

MARQUIS. [*Taking the card*] Mathieu — Adolphe. I don't know him. What does the gentleman look like?

SERVANT. He is an actor I once saw at a little theatre — I believe he is the same one.

MARQUIS. What can he want with me? An artist, a Frenchman? Ask him to come in. [*The servant goes out*]

MARQUISE. [*To GENEVIÈVE.*] Go to your room. [*GENEVIÈVE goes out*]

ADOLPHE comes in.

ADOLPHE. Forgive me for disturbing you, Monsieur and Madame. I wished to see Mme. la Comtesse, but she is out, and I took the liberty of —

MARQUIS. Very glad to see you, my dear Monsieur — I have always had a liking for artists.

ADOLPHE. I beg your pardon, Monsieur, but it is not as an artist that I come to see you, but as a man. You see before you a prodigal son who was drawn to the footlights by an irresistible sense of vocation, but who in leaving the stage has found again the position and manners befitting his status.

MARQUIS. [*Dryly*] That is different. — What can I do for you?

ADOLPHE. Let us go back a little, if you please. I lately had the honour of sitting at your table.

MARQUIS. My table? Are you dreaming, Monsieur?

ADOLPHE. Not in the least. The scene — there is no other word for it — took place in this very room. There is the picture which we illuminated. [*Looking at the MARQUISE*] An excellent likeness, Madame, very noble! My compliments! Good portraits are so rare nowadays! I wanted to have one of Mme. Mathieu —

MARQUIS. Indeed, Monsieur?

MARQUISE. When was this?

ADOLPHE. Last Saturday.

MARQUISE. [*To her husband*] The day Mme. Morin came. We were dining out.

ADOLPHE. Yes, you were not at home. There were four of us; your charming niece, an elderly lady — very distinguished looking — a gay gentleman, and your humble servant, who had the good fortune to happen in at the time.

MARQUIS. What brought you?

ADOLPHE. I came to offer a box for my benefit performance.

MARQUIS. Then why not come to the point at once, Monsieur? I don't go to the theatre any longer, but, as a compatriot, I am ready to subscribe.

ADOLPHE. Very kind of you, but the performance took place yesterday.

MARQUIS. Was it successful?

ADOLPHE. We didn't cover expenses.

MARQUISE. I see. What is the price of my box?

ADOLPHE. I was not asking for charity, Monsieur. My father was a gentleman, one of the largest hardware merchants in Paris.

MARQUIS. [*Smiling*] Noblesse oblige! I had no intention of offending you, Monsieur.

MARQUISE. We are ready to offer any excuses.

ADOLPHE. I ask for none, Madame.

MARQUIS. [*Offering him a chair*] Sit down. [*Taking his snuff-box from his pocket and handing it to ADOLPHE*] Will you have some snuff?

ADOLPHE. Just a pinch.

MARQUIS. How do you like it?

ADOLPHE. It's delicious! So — where was I?

MARQUIS. At the table —

ADOLPHE. Oh, yes. After dinner, I was asked to sing. Naturally, I couldn't think of receiving money for my services, because I acted in my capacity of man of the world. Then

Mme. la comtesse induced me to accept this pearl — as a present to my wife. [*He takes the pearl from his pocket*]

MARQUISE. [*Quickly*] Let me see it, Monsieur. [*She takes it.*] Didn't this belong to a diamond necklace?

ADOLPHE. Yes, Madame.

MARQUIS. [*To himself*] Very bad taste on her part!

ADOLPHE. I wanted to keep it as a souvenir, but you see I was counting on that blessed benefit yesterday to pay off some debts —

MARQUIS. Are you in debt?

ADOLPHE. Gambling debts. [*To himself*] At the bakery! [*To the others*] They fall due in twenty-four hours, you understand, so that I had to take this to the jeweller's.

MARQUIS. And he told you what it was worth?

ADOLPHE. Yes, Monsieur. Now, I can hardly believe that Mme. la comtesse intended to make me so valuable a present.

MARQUIS. So valuable!

ADOLPHE. The jeweller offered me a thousand florins.

MARQUISE. Then it's real. [*She knocks the pearl against the table*] Yes, it is!

MARQUIS. What does this mean?

ADOLPHE. What do you think? That I came here to ask for money? Nothing of the kind —!

MARQUIS. You bring it! Shake hands, Monsieur, you are a true gentleman. As for that pearl, my niece *did* know what she was doing when she gave it to you — it is yours. But please allow me to buy it from you. I should like to return it to her.

He takes some bank-notes from his pocketbook.

ADOLPHE. Ah, M. le marquis!

MARQUISE. [*To the MARQUIS*] Poor fellow, he's so embarrassed!

MARQUIS. Since you seem to like my snuff, allow me to present the box to you — as a souvenir. [*He takes out his snuff-box*]

ADOLPHE. M. le marquis, I promise you I shall always keep it.

MARQUIS. Au revoir, my friend.

ADOLPHE. Then you will allow me to come and see you occasionally?

MARQUIS. Honest people like yourself are always welcome in the homes of honest people like ourselves.

ADOLPHE. M. le marquis, you have given me a signal honour!

MARQUIS. [*Laughing*] The Order of the Snuff-box. [ADOLPHE goes out] A fine fellow — and he carries away with him one of my old-fashioned prejudices. [HENRI enters] Here, nephew, give this pearl to your wife, and ask her not to play any more tricks on us. In other words, ask her not to try to deceive us with any more paste imitations!

HENRI. [*Going to the MARQUISE*] What's this?

MARQUISE. This pearl is real; so are the diamonds, in all probability.

HENRI. Then why did she lie to us?

MARQUISE. Probably she was afraid you would scold her for her extravagance.

HENRI. I gave her fifty thousand francs with which to buy jewels. She should have told me she'd spent some of the money in advance.

MARQUISE. False pride, perhaps.

HENRI. Possibly.

MARQUIS. Here she is. I shall take particular pleasure in making it embarrassing for her!

Enter PAULINE, wearing her hat. HENRI goes to the left and watches her intently.

You're just in time, niece. We were speaking of your paste imitations and marvelling at the immense progress in chemistry.

PAULINE. [*Taking off her hat and shawl*] Diamonds are so cleverly imitated that it is almost impossible to distinguish the artificial ones from the real.

MARQUIS. Will you show me your necklace?

PAULINE. I haven't it any longer — I sent it back to the jeweller's.

MARQUIS. Why?

PAULINE. Madame told me that the Countess de Puygiron should not wear artificial jewels.

MARQUISE. Take care, child.

HENRI. Aunt!

MARQUISE. No, I don't want to see her any more involved in her lie. We know that the stones are real.

PAULINE. Well — I confess —

MARQUIS. That you haven't returned them to the jeweller's?

PAULINE. I did return them! Yes! I was afraid the trick would be discovered — so I put an end to all that nonsense!

HENRI. How much did you lose on the exchange?

PAULINE. Nothing.

HENRI. Nothing at all?

PAULINE. Of course not.

HENRI. Not even the price of this pearl? [*He shows her the pearl*]

PAULINE. [*To herself*] The devil! [*To the others*] I didn't want you to know — I was going to pay for it out of my savings.

HENRI. Where does the jeweller live?

PAULINE. Never mind, I'll see to it.

HENRI. Where does he live?

PAULINE. Monsieur, the way you insist —!

HENRI. Answer me and don't lie!

PAULINE. Do you suspect something?

HENRI. [*Violently*] Yes, I suspect that these diamonds were given you by M. de Beauséjour!

PAULINE. Oh, Henri!

MARQUISE. Remember, she's your wife!

HENRI. If I am mistaken, let her give me the address of the jeweller, and I'll make sure at once.

PAULINE. No, Monsieur, I refuse to stoop in order to justify myself. Your suspicion is too vile. Believe what you like.

HENRI. You forget that you have no right to be so haughty about it.

PAULINE. And why, if you please? I defy you to say!

HENRI. You defy me?

MARQUIS. You don't know what you are saying, my boy. It is very wrong, of course, for your wife to be so obstinate, but what the devil! think of it; you're accusing her of an infamy!

MARQUISE. [*To PAULINE*] Pauline, take pity on him! He doesn't know what he is saying. Prove that he's wrong.

PAULINE. No, Madame, I shan't say another word.

HENRI. She's vile! She sold herself!

MARQUIS. Henri, your conduct is not that of a gentleman! Ask your wife's pardon.

HENRI. I beg *your* pardon — all of you! That woman is Olympe Taverny! [*The MARQUIS is thunderstruck. The MARQUISE stands at his side. PAULINE is at the right, HENRI at the left. HENRI goes to his uncle, and falls to his knees*] Forgive me, father, for having dishonoured the name you bear, for having allowed that woman to impose on me, for having polluted this pure house by her presence!

MARQUIS. I disown you!

MARQUISE. But he loved her then, and thought her worthy of us, because he believed her worthy of himself. This marriage was the fault of his youth, not a crime against his honour as a man. Don't disown him, dear — he is very unhappy!

After a pause, the MARQUIS offers his hand to HENRI and helps him rise, without looking at him.

HENRI kisses his aunt's hands profusely.

HENRI. A duel to the end with M. de Beauséjour now — pistols — ten paces!

MARQUIS. Good! I'll be your second! [*HENRI goes out. The MARQUIS opens a drawer and takes out a case of pistols, which he places on the table in silence*]

PAULINE. Don't trouble to get those ready, M. le marquis. Your nephew is not going to challenge M. de Beauséjour, for the excellent reason that M. de Beauséjour left Vienna last night. I have just now allowed Henri to leave, because his presence here would have interfered with an explanation which we are going to have.

MARQUIS. An explanation between us, Mademoiselle? Your explanation will be made in court.

PAULINE. I can easily imagine that you would like to drag me into court — that is what I should like to discuss. There is one point which you know nothing of: I shall enlighten you.

MARQUIS. The lawyer will see to that. Leave us.

PAULINE. Very well. [*To the MARQUISE*] Will you be kind enough to give Mlle. Geneviève this gold key? She has been looking for it since yesterday.

MARQUISE. The key to the box?

PAULINE. Which contains the record of her heart's history.

MARQUISE. How do you happen to have it?

PAULINE. I simply took it. Indelicate of me, was it not? You see, I have not been well brought up. I thought I should find in that box just the weapons I might need some day. — I was not mistaken. Will Mme. la marquise be pleased to hear some extracts? [*She gives the MARQUISE a slip of paper*]

MARQUIS. Another blackguardly trick!

PAULINE. A rather brutal way of putting it! But I am not one to defend your granddaughter!

MARQUISE. [*Unfolding the paper*] This isn't her handwriting!

PAULINE. You don't think I'm foolish enough to let you have the original? That is in safe-keeping, in Paris. — Read.

MARQUISE. [*Reading*] "April 17. — What is happening to me? Henri doesn't love Pauline any more. He loves me —"

MARQUIS. [*To his wife*] Would Henri be so —!

PAULINE. Undignified as to make love to his cousin? Looks like it, doesn't it? But you needn't worry: I told her.

MARQUIS. You, Madame?

PAULINE. And I told no more than the truth.

MARQUIS. [*To his wife*] Does Henri love his cousin?

MARQUISE. [*Reading*] "I love him. Oh, now I am sure I have never felt otherwise toward him ——" Poor dear! — "God have pity on me! That love is a crime! Grant me the power to tear it from my heart! I considered him dead! Why has he come back again?"

MARQUIS. [*To PAULINE*] Yes, why?

PAULINE. Continue, you will hear!

MARQUISE. [*Reading*] "April 20. — My heart is deeply troubled: what can I do with this love — which, after all, might become legitimate? He will always feel remorse. He is dishonoured by the fearful hope which he feels — in spite of me. But is it my fault if Pauline cannot recover from the illness that is killing her?"

MARQUIS. You again? [*PAULINE bows*]

MARQUISE. That is why she wanted to have us all to go to Italy!

MARQUIS. [*To PAULINE*] If a *man* were capable of such infamy, I'd shoot him like a dog! But a woman, it seems, may do anything!

PAULINE. [*To the MARQUIS, smiling*] It is most fortunate that we have the privileges accorded us by reason of our weakness, you must admit. But to return to your granddaughter: I think the reading of her little romance will attract more admirers than husbands. Don't worry, though, I shan't publish this precious document unless you force me to — and you won't do that, I'm sure.

MARQUIS. Make your conditions, Madame.

PAULINE. At last, thank God, you are reasonable. I shall follow suit. All I ask is an amicable separation, and that I keep the money agreed on in my contract.

MARQUIS. You will not use our name?

PAULINE. Oh, M. le marquis, I realise its value!

MARQUIS. We shall pay you!

PAULINE. You are not rich enough. And what would you think of me for selling the title? No, I have it and I intend to keep it. An amicable separation cannot take from me what a legal one cannot — you must at least be just.

MARQUISE. [*To her husband*] She has us bound, hand and foot!

MARQUIS. Very well!

PAULINE. Now we are agreed. You must arrange it all with Henri. I'll rid you of my company at once. [*She turns to go*]

MARQUIS. One moment — first we must have Geneviève's diary.

PAULINE. I told you it was in Paris.

MARQUIS. Write to the receiver of stolen goods to return it at once.

PAULINE. Nothing is simpler. But, really, if I give up my only weapon, what guarantee shall I have —?

MARQUIS. My word as a gentleman.

PAULINE. Good; between people of honour a given word is enough. Well, I give you my word that I shall not misuse my precious treasure. What would be the good for me?

MARQUIS. The pleasure of revenge. You must hate us, for you realise how we despise you.

PAULINE. Is that the way you hope to persuade me?

MARQUISE. The Marquis uses strong expressions — it's very wrong of him. Be kind, Madame! Please, for our dear grandchild's sake, take pity on our gray hairs! I shall pray for you!

PAULINE. [*Smiling*] Good for evil, Madame!

MARQUIS. That will do, Marquise! [*He passes in front of PAULINE, without looking at her. To the MARQUISE*] Leave me alone with her.

MARQUISE. But, my dear —

MARQUIS. [*Conducting the MARQUISE to the door*] Leave us! [*The MARQUISE goes out. The MARQUIS sends her a long kiss with his two hands, and comes down-stage again*]

PAULINE. You're pale, M. le marquis.

MARQUIS. [*His arms crossed as he stands immovable*] You would be paler than I if you knew what I was thinking!

PAULINE. Ah, threats?

MARQUIS. [*Slowly*] We have begged, but there was no use. My dear saint of a wife has prostrated herself before you.

PAULINE. Well?

MARQUIS. [*About to seize her*] Well, you damned ——! [*He stops*] Our salvation lies in our own hands now, understand?

PAULINE. I'm not afraid; I've gagged bigger men than you.

MARQUIS. [*Staccato*] Write as I dictate.

PAULINE. [*Shrugging her shoulders*] You're dawdling, Marquis.

MARQUIS. Write this instant, do you hear me? Tomorrow will be too late!

PAULINE. Because?

MARQUIS. Because if once my granddaughter's secret is known, the only possible reparation will be her marriage with your husband, and, by God, if that happens, she *shall* marry him!

PAULINE. [*Smiling*] You mean that you'll — suppress me? My dear Monsieur, do you take me for a child? [*She tries to go*]

MARQUIS. [*Laying his hand on the pistols*] Take care!

PAULINE. Why? Don't mind about those pistols—they're not loaded. Now let's stop trifling—you're bound to lose in the end.

MARQUIS. [*Composing himself*] Write as I tell you, and I will give you half a million francs.

PAULINE. You offer to buy my artillery on the day of battle? Your humble servant. Adieu, dear Uncle —— [*She goes toward the door at the left*]

MARQUIS. [*Taking up a pistol*] If you try to pass that door, I will kill you.

PAULINE. [*On the threshold, as she hums an air from "Les Etudiants":*]

When you make love to a little girl
And compromise her ——

MARQUIS. [*Fires. PAULINE screams and falls, outside the door. The MARQUIS takes another pistol and loads it*] God is my judge!

CURTAIN

MONSIEUR POIRIER'S SON-IN-LAW

[LE GENDRE DE M. POIRIER]

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

BY EMILE AUGIER AND JULES SANDEAU

PERSONS REPRESENTED

POIRIER. - *husb.*

GASTON, MARQUIS DE PRESLES. - *son-in-law*

HECTOR, DUKE DE MONTMEYRAN. - *friend of P.*

VERDELET. - *friend of Poirier*

ANTOINETTE. - *daughter*

SALOMON.

CHAVASSUS. } *Creditors*

COGNE.

VATEL. - *cook*

THE PORTER.

A SERVANT.

The action takes place in the home of M. Poirier, at Paris.

MONSIEUR POIRIER'S SON-IN-LAW

FIRST ACT

A very richly-furnished drawing-room. There are doors on either side, and windows at the back, looking out upon the garden.

There is a fireplace in which a fire is burning.

As the curtain rises, a SERVANT and the DUKE are discovered.

SERVANT. I repeat, Corporal, Monsieur le marquis cannot possibly receive you. He is not up yet.

DUKE. At nine o'clock! [*Aside*] Ha, the sun rises slowly during the honeymoon. — What time is breakfast served here?

SERVANT. At eleven, but what business is that of yours?

DUKE. You will lay another place.

SERVANT. For your colonel?

DUKE. Yes, for my colonel. Is this today's paper?

SERVANT. Yes: February 15, 1846.

DUKE. Give it to me.

SERVANT. I haven't read it yet.

DUKE. You refuse to let me have it? Well, you see, don't you, that I can't wait? Announce me.

SERVANT. Who are you?

DUKE. The Duke de Montmeyran.

SERVANT. Stop your joking!

Enter GASTON.

GASTON. Why, it's you! [*They embrace*]

SERVANT. [*Aside*] The devil! I've put my foot in it!

DUKE. My dear Gaston!

GASTON. My dear Hector! I'm so glad to see you!

DUKE. And I you!

GASTON. You couldn't possibly have arrived at a better time.

DUKE. How do you mean?

GASTON. Let me tell you — but, my poor fellow, the way you're rigged up! Who would recognize under that tunic, you, one of the princes of youth, the perfect model of prodigal sons?

DUKE. Next to you, old man. We've both settled down; you have married, I have become a soldier, and whatever you think of my uniform, I prefer my regiment to yours.

GASTON. [*Looking at the DUKE'S uniform*] Thank you!

DUKE. Yes, look at the tunic. It's the only costume that can keep me from boring myself to death. And this little decoration which you pretend not to notice — [*He shows his corporal's stripes*]

GASTON. Stripes!

DUKE. Which I picked up on the field of Isly, old man —

GASTON. And when will you get the star for bravery?

DUKE. My dear fellow, please let's not joke about those things. It was all very well in the past, but today, the Cross is my one ambition. I would willingly shed a pint of my blood for it.

GASTON. You are a real soldier, I see!

DUKE. Yes — I love my profession. It's the only one for a ruined gentleman. I have but one regret: that I did not enter it long ago. This active and adventurous life is infinitely attractive. Even discipline has its peculiar charm: it's healthy, it calms the mind — this having one's life arranged for one in advance, without any possible discussion, and consequently, without hesitation and without regret. That's why I can feel so carefree and happy. I know my duty, I do it, and I am content.

GASTON. Without very great cost on your part.

DUKE. And then, old man, those patriotic ideas we used to make fun of at the *Café de Paris* and call chauvinism, make our hearts swell in the face of the enemy. The first cannon-shot knocks forever the last vestige of that nonsense out of our

minds; the flag then is no longer a bit of cloth at the end of a stick: it is the very vesture of the *Patrie*.

GASTON. That's all very well, but this enthusiasm for a flag which is not your own —

DUKE. Nonsense, you can't see the colour in the midst of the powder smoke.

GASTON. Well, the important point is that you are satisfied. Are you going to stay in Paris for some time?

DUKE. Just a month. You know how I've arranged my manner of living?

GASTON. No — tell me.

DUKE. Didn't I? It's really very clever: before leaving, I left the remains of my fortune with a certain banker: about a hundred thousand francs, the income from which allows me during a month in the year to live as I used to live. So that I live for one month at a six thousand francs' rate, and for the rest of the year, on six sous a day. Naturally, I have chosen carnival season for my prodigalities. It began yesterday, but my first visit has been to see you.

GASTON. Thanks! But, you understand, I shan't hear of your staying anywhere but with me?

DUKE. But I don't want to be in the way —

GASTON. You won't: there's a small pavilion here, at the end of the garden.

DUKE. To be perfectly frank, I'm not afraid of you, but of myself. You see — you lead a family life here: there's your wife, your father-in-law —

GASTON. Ah, you imagine that simply because I have married the daughter of a retired dry-goods merchant my home is a temple of boredom, that my wife brought with her a heap of bourgeois virtues, that all that remains for me to do is write an inscription over my door: "Here lies Gaston, Marquis de Presles." Make no mistake, I live like a prince even, race my horses, gamble like the devil, buy pictures, have the finest chef in Paris — the fellow pretends he's a direct descendant of Vatel, and takes his art ever so seriously — I invite whom I like to

meals (by the way, you'll dine with all my friends tomorrow, and you'll see how I treat them). In short, marriage has not — changed me in the least — except it has done away with creditors. —

DUKE. So your wife and your father-in-law leave you free rein?

GASTON. Absolutely. My wife is a nice little boarding-school miss, rather pretty, somewhat awkward, timid, still wide-eyed with wonder at the sudden change in her station in life, who passes the greater part of her time, I'll warrant, looking at the Marquise de Presles in her mirror. As to Monsieur Poirier, my father-in-law, he is worthy of his name. Modest and nutritious like all fruit-trees, he was born to play the part of a wall fruit-tree. His highest ambition is to serve as a gentleman's dessert: that ambition is now satisfied.

DUKE. Come now, do such bourgeois still exist?

Gaston ~~DUKE~~. In a word, he is Georges Dandin become a father-in-law. But, really, I've made a magnificent match of it.

DUKE. I can well believe that you had good reasons for contracting this misalliance..

GASTON. Judge for yourself. You know the desperate straits I was in? I was an orphan at the age of fifteen, master of a fortune at twenty. I quickly ran through my patrimony, and was rapidly running up a capital of debts, worthy the nephew of my uncle. Now, at the very moment when that capital reached the figure of five hundred thousand francs, thanks to my activities, what did my seventy-year old uncle do but marry a young girl who had fallen in love with him? Corvisart said that at seventy one always has children. I didn't count on cousins — well, I was forced to do so.

DUKE. And then you occupied the position of honorary nephew.

GASTON. I thought of taking a position in the rank of active sons-in-law. At that time Heaven sent Monsieur Poirier across my path.

DUKE. How did you happen to meet him?

GASTON. He had some money he wanted to invest — it was the merest matter of chance, and we met. I lacked sufficient guarantee as a debtor, but I offered him enough for a son-in-law. I made inquiries about his person, assured myself that his fortune had been honourably acquired, and then, by Jove, I married his daughter.

DUKE. Who brought you — ?

GASTON. The old fellow had four millions; now he has only three.

DUKE. A dowry of a million?

GASTON. Better still: you'll see. He agreed to pay my debts. By the way, today a visible proof of the phenomenon can be seen, I believe. It was a matter of five hundred thousand francs. The day we signed the contract he gave me stock which will net me an income of twenty-five thousand francs: five hundred thousand francs more!

DUKE. There's your million. And then?

GASTON. Then? He insisted on not being separated from his daughter, and agreed to defray all household expenses so long as we lived in his home with him. So that, after receiving lodging, heat, carriages, and board, I still have an income of twenty-five thousand francs for my wife and myself.

DUKE. Very neat.

GASTON. Wait a moment.

DUKE. Something else?

GASTON. He bought back the Château de Presles, and I expect that any day I shall find the deeds under my plate at breakfast.

DUKE. What a delightful father-in-law!

GASTON. Wait a moment!

DUKE. What? More?

GASTON. As soon as the contract was signed, he came to me, took my hands in his, and made any number of excuses for being no more than sixty years old; but he assured me that he would hurry on to the age of eighty. But I'm in no great haste — he's not in the way, the poor man. He knows his place, goes —

to bed with the chickens, rises at cock-crow, keeps his accounts, and is ready to satisfy my every whim. He is a steward who does not rob me; I should have to look long to find a better.

DUKE. Really, you are the most fortunate of men.

GASTON. And wait — you might imagine that my marriage has lessened me in the eyes of the world, that it has "taken the shine out of me," as Monsieur Poirier says. Never worry, I still hold my place in the social world. I lead in matters of fashion. The women have forgiven me. As I was saying, you have arrived in the nick of time.

DUKE. Why?

GASTON. Don't you understand — you, my born second?

DUKE. A duel?

GASTON. Yes, a nice little duel, the kind we used to have, in the days of our youth. Well, what do you say? Is the old Marquis de Presles dead? Are you thinking of burying him yet?

DUKE. Whom are you fighting with, and why?

GASTON. The Viscount de Pontgrimaud — a gambling quarrel.

DUKE. Gambling quarrel? Can't it be decided otherwise?

GASTON. Is that the way you are taught to regulate affairs of honour in the regiment?

DUKE. Yes, in the regiment. There we are taught what use to make of our blood. But you can't persuade me that you must shed it over a gambling quarrel?

GASTON. But what if this particular quarrel were only a pretext? What if there is something else — behind it?

DUKE. A woman!

GASTON. That's it.

DUKE. An affair — so soon? That's bad!

GASTON. How could I help it? A last year's passion I had imagined dead of the cold, and which, a month after my marriage, had its Indian Summer. You see, there's nothing serious in it, and no cause for worry.

DUKE. And might I know — ?

GASTON. I can have no secrets from you: the Countess de Montjay.

DUKE. My compliments, but the matter *is* serious. I once thought of making love to her, but I retired before the dangers of such a *liaison*—that sort of danger has little enough of chivalry in it. You know, of course, that the Countess has no money of her own?

GASTON. That she is waiting for the fortune of her aged husband; that he would have the bad taste to disinherit her in case he discovered her guilt? I know all that.

DUKE. And out of sheer lightness of heart have you imposed that bond on yourself?

GASTON. Habit, a certain residue of my former love, the temptation of forbidden fruit, the pleasure of cutting out that little fool Pontgrimaud, whom I detest —

DUKE. Why, you're doing him an honour!

GASTON. What else can I do? He gets on my nerves, the little imp; he imagines that he is a noble by reason of his knightly achievements, simply because his grandfather, Monsieur Grimaud, supplied arms to the government. He's a Viscount, Heaven knows how or why, and he imagines that he belongs to a nobility older than our own. He never loses an opportunity to pose as champion of the nobility, and tries to make people believe for that very reason that he represents it. If a Montmorency is scratched, he howls as if he himself had been hit. I tell you there was a quarrel brewing between us, and last night it came to a head over a game of cards. I'll let him off with a scratch: the first in the history of his family.

DUKE. Has he sent his seconds to you?

GASTON. I expect them at any moment. You and Grand-lieu will help me.

DUKE. Very well.

GASTON. Of course, you will stay here with me?

DUKE. Delighted.

GASTON. Though this is carnival season, you don't intend to parade about as a hero, do you?

DUKE. No. I wrote beforehand to my tailor —

GASTON. Shh! I hear someone talking. It's my father-in-law. You'll now have an opportunity of seeing him, with his — old friend Verdelet, a former partner. You're in luck —

Enter POIRIER and VERDELET.

GASTON. How are you, Monsieur Verdelet?

VERDELET. Your servant, Messieurs.

GASTON. A dear friend of mine, my dear Monsieur Poirier: the Duke de Montmeyran.

DUKE. Corporal of the African Cavalry.

VERDELET. [*Aside*] Indeed!

POIRIER. Most honoured, Monsieur le duc!

GASTON. More honoured than you think, dear Monsieur Poirier: for Monsieur le duc has been good enough to accept the hospitality which I offered him.

VERDELET. [*Aside*] Another rat in the cheese! —

DUKE. I beg your pardon, Monsieur, for accepting an invitation which my friend Gaston has possibly been a trifle too hasty in offering.

POIRIER. Monsieur — le marquis, my son-in-law, need never feel obliged to consult me before inviting his friends to stay with him here. The friends of our friends —

GASTON. Very well, Monsieur Poirier. Hector will stay in the garden pavilion. Is it ready for him?

POIRIER. I shall see to it at once.

DUKE. I am very sorry, Monsieur, to cause you any annoyance —

GASTON. None at all; Monsieur Poirier will be only too happy —

POIRIER. Too happy —

GASTON. And you will of course give orders that the little blue coupé be placed at his disposal?

POIRIER. The one I usually use — ? —

DUKE. Oh, I positively refuse —

POIRIER. But I can easily hire one; there is a stand at the end of the street.

— VERDELET. [*Aside*] Fool! Idiot!

GASTON. [*To the DUKE*] Now, let us take a look at the stables. Yesterday I got a superb Arabian — you can tell me what you think of him. Come.

DUKE. [*To POIRIER*] With your permission, Monsieur. Gaston is impatient to show me his luxurious surroundings. I don't blame him. He can then tell me more about you.

POIRIER. Monsieur le duc is well acquainted with my son-in-law's delicate nature and tastes.

GASTON. [*Aside to the DUKE*] You'll spoil my father-in-law! [*Going toward the door, and stopping*] By the way, Monsieur Poirier, you know I am giving a grand dinner party tomorrow night. Will you give us the pleasure of your company?

POIRIER. No, thank you — I am dining with Verdelet. —

GASTON. Ah, Monsieur Verdelet, I am very angry with you for carrying off my father-in-law every time I have company here.

VERDELET. [*Aside*]. Impertinent!

POIRIER. A man of my age would only be in the way!

VERDELET. [*Aside*] You old G ronte!

GASTON. As you please, Monsieur Poirier. [*He goes out with the DUKE*]

VERDELET. I tell you, that son-in-law of yours is mighty obsequious with you. You warned me beforehand: you'd know how to make him respect you.

POIRIER. I'm doing what pleases me. I prefer to be loved than feared.

VERDELET. You've not always thought that way. Well, you've succeeded: your son-in-law is on a more familiar footing with you than with the other servants.

POIRIER. I can dispense with your clever remarks, and I advise you to mind your own business.

VERDELET. This is my own business, I tell you! Aren't

we partners? Why, we're a little like the Siamese twins. Now, when you grovel before that marquis, I have a hard time keeping my temper.

POIRIER. Grovell! As if — ? That Marquis! Do you think I am dazzled by his title? I've always been more of a Liberal than you, and I still am. I don't care a snap of my finger for the nobility! Ability and virtue are the only social distinctions that I recognise and before which I bow down.

VERDELET. Is your son-in-law virtuous?

POIRIER. You make me tired. Do you want me to make him feel that he owes everything to me?

VERDELET. Oh, oh, you have become very considerate in your old age — the result of your economical habits, doubtless. Look here, Poirier, I never did approve of this marriage; you know that I always wanted my dear goddaughter to marry a man from our own class. But you refused to listen to reason

POIRIER. Ha, ha! Listen to Monsieur! That's the last straw!

VERDELET. Well, why not?

POIRIER. Oh, Monsieur Verdelet, you are most clever and you have the noblest ideals; you have read amusing books, you have your own ideas on every subject, but in the matter of commonsense, I can give you enormous odds.

VERDELET. Oh, as to commonsense — you mean business sense. I don't deny that: you've piled up four millions, while I've barely made forty thousand a year.

POIRIER. And that you owe to me.

VERDELET. I don't deny it. What I have I owe to you. But it is all going eventually to your daughter, after your son-in-law has ruined you.

POIRIER. Ruined me?

VERDELET. Yes — within ten years.

POIRIER. You're crazy.

VERDELET. At the rate he's going now, you know only too well how long it will take him to run through his money.

POIRIER. Well, that's my business.

VERDELET. If you were the only one concerned, I'd never open my lips.

POIRIER. Why not? Don't you take any interest in my welfare? You don't care then if I am ruined? I, who have made your fortune?

VERDELET. What is the matter with you? —

POIRIER. I don't like ungrateful people.

VERDELET. The devil! You're taking out your son-in-law's familiarities on me. I was going to say, if you were the only one concerned, I could at least be patient about it: you aren't my godson, but it happens that your daughter is my goddaughter.

POIRIER. I was a fool to give you that right over her.

VERDELET. You might easily have found someone who loved her less.

POIRIER. Yes, yes, I know — you love her more than I do — I know; you claim that — and you've even persuaded her —

VERDELET. Are we going to quarrel about that again? For Heaven's sake, then, go ahead!

POIRIER. I will go ahead! Do you think I like to see myself left out, pushed aside by a stranger? Have I no place in my own daughter's heart?

VERDELET. She has the tenderest affection for you —

POIRIER. That's not so: you've taken my place. All her secrets, all her nice pleasing little ways are for you.

VERDELET. Because I don't make her afraid. How can you expect the little one to be confidential with an old bear like you? She can never find an opening, you're always so crabbed.

POIRIER. Well, you are the one who has made me play the part of a kill-joy, while you usurp that of a sugar-plum father. It's not right to make up to children by giving in to all their wishes and forgetting what's good for them. That's loving them for your sake, instead of for theirs.

VERDELET. Now, Poirier, you know very well that when

the real interests of your daughter were at stake, her whims were opposed by me, and by me alone. Heaven knows, I went against poor Toinon's wishes in this marriage, while you were ass enough to urge her on.

POIRIER. She was in love with the Marquis. — Let me read my paper. [*He sits down and glances through the "Constitutionnel"*]

VERDELET. It's all very well for you to say the child was in love: you forced her into it. You brought the Marquis de Presles here.

POIRIER. [*Rising*] Another one has arrived at the top! Monsieur Michaud, the iron master, has just been appointed a peer of France.

VERDELET. What do I care?

POIRIER. What do you care! Does it make no difference to you to see a man of our class arrive at the top? To see the government honour industry in calling one of her representatives into its midst? Don't you think it admirable that we live in a country and an age in which labour opens every door? You have a right to look forward to becoming a peer some day, and you ask "What do I care?"

VERDELET. Heaven preserve me from aspiring to the peerage! And Heaven preserve my country when I become a peer!

POIRIER. But why? Can't Monsieur Michaud fill his position?

VERDELET. Monsieur Michaud is not only a business man, but a man of great personal merit. [*Molière's father was an upholsterer, but that is no reason why every upholsterer's son should believe himself a poet.*]

POIRIER. I tell you, commerce is the true school for statesmen. Who shall lay his hand on the wheel unless it is those who have first learned to steer their own barks?

VERDELET. A bark is not a ship, and a little captain is not necessarily a true pilot, and France is no commercial house. I can hardly restrain myself when I see this mania taking root in people's minds. I declare, you might imagine that states-

manship in this country was nothing more than a pastime for people who have nothing else to do! A business man like you or me attends to his own little concerns for thirty years; he makes his fortune, and one fine day closes his shop and sets up business as a statesman. With no more effort than that! Very simple receipt! Good Lord, Messieurs, you might just as well say: "I have measured so many yards of cloth, and I therefore know how to play the violin!"

POIRIER. I don't exactly see what connection — ?

VERDELET. Instead of thinking about governing France, learn to govern your own home. Don't marry off your daughters to ruined marquises who imagine they are doing you an honour in allowing you to pay off their debts with your own hard cash —

POIRIER. Are you saying that for me — ?

VERDELET. No: for myself!

Enter ANTOINETTE.

ANTOINETTE. How are you, father? How is everything? Hello, godfather. Are you going to have lunch with us? How nice you are!

POIRIER. He is nice. But what am I, I who invited him?

ANTOINETTE. You are charming.

POIRIER. But only when I invite Verdelet. Agreeable for me!

ANTOINETTE. Where is my husband?

POIRIER. In the stable. Where else would he be?

ANTOINETTE. Do you blame him for liking horses? Isn't it natural for a gentleman to like horses and arms — ?

POIRIER. Oh, yes, but I wish he cared for something else.

ANTOINETTE. He is very fond of the arts: poetry, painting, music.

POIRIER. Huh, the agreeable arts! Pleasures!

VERDELET. Would you expect him to care for unpleasant arts? Would you want him to play the piano?

POIRIER. There you are again, taking his part before

TOINON. You're trying to get into her good graces. [To ANTOINETTE] He was just telling me that your husband was ruining me. Didn't you?

VERDELET. Yes, but all you have to do is to pull tight your purse-strings.

POIRIER. It would be much simpler if the young man had some occupation.

VERDELET. It seems to me that he is very much occupied as it is.

POIRIER. Yes: spending money from morning till night. I'd prefer a more lucrative occupation.

ANTOINETTE. What, for instance? He can't sell cloth.

POIRIER. He wouldn't be able to. I don't ask for so very much, after all. Let him take a position that befits his rank: an embassy, for instance.

VERDELET. An embassy? You don't take an embassy the way you take cold.

POIRIER. When a man is called the Marquis de Presles, he can aspire to anything.

ANTOINETTE. But on the other hand, father, he need not aspire to anything.

VERDELET. That's true. Your son-in-law has his own ideas —

POIRIER. Only one: to be lazy.

ANTOINETTE. That's not fair, father: my husband has very fine ideals.

VERDELET. At least, if he hasn't, he possesses that chivalrous obstinacy of his rank. Do you think for one moment that your son-in-law is going to give up the traditions of his family, just for the sake of changing his lazy life?

POIRIER. You don't know my son-in-law, Verdelet; I have studied him thoroughly — I did that before giving my daughter to him. He's hare-brained, and the lightness of his character prevents his being obstinate. As to his family traditions, well, if he had thought very much of them he would never have married Mademoiselle Poirier.

VERDELET. That makes no difference. It would have been much wiser to have sounded him on this subject before the marriage.

POIRIER. What a fool you are! It would have looked as if I were making a bargain with him, and he would have refused point-blank. You can't get things of that sort unless you go about it in the right way, slowly, tenaciously, perseveringly. He has been living here this past three months on the fat of the land.

VERDELET. I see: you wanted to make it pleasant for him before you came down to business.

POIRIER. Exactly. [*To ANTOINETTE*] A man is always indulgent toward his wife during the honeymoon. Now if you ask him in a nice way — in the evening — when you're taking down your hair — ?

ANTOINETTE. Oh, father — !

POIRIER. That's the way Madame Poirier used to get me to promise to take her to the Opera — I always took her the next day. See?

ANTOINETTE. But I'd never dare speak to my husband on so serious a subject.

POIRIER. Your dowry will surely give you a good enough right to speak.

ANTOINETTE. He would only shrug his shoulders, and not answer.

VERDELET. Does he do that when you talk with him?

ANTOINETTE. No, but —

VERDELET. Ah, you look away! So your husband treats you a little — ? I've been afraid of that.

POIRIER. Have you any reason to complain of him?

ANTOINETTE. No, father.

POIRIER. Doesn't he love you? —

ANTOINETTE. I don't say that. —

POIRIER. Then what do you say?

ANTOINETTE. Nothing.

VERDELET. Come, dear, you should speak frankly with

your old friends. Our whole object in life is to look after your happiness. Whom have you left to confide in unless it's your father and your godfather? Are you unhappy?

ANTOINETTE. I haven't the right to be: my husband is very kind and good.

POIRIER. Well, then?

VERDELET. But is that enough? He's kind and good, but he pays no more attention to you than to some pretty doll, does he?

ANTOINETTE. It's my fault. I'm so timid with him; I've never dared open my heart to him. I'm sure he thinks me a little boarding-school miss who wanted to become a marquise.

POIRIER. The fool!

VERDELET. Why don't you explain to him?

ANTOINETTE. I tried to more than once, but the tone of voice of his first answer was so different from what I thought it should be, that I couldn't continue. There are certain kinds of intimacy that must be encouraged — the heart has a reticence of its own. You ought to be able to understand that, dear Tony?

POIRIER. Well, what about me? Don't I understand, too?

ANTOINETTE. You, too, father. How can I tell Gaston that it wasn't his title that pleased me, but his manners, his mind, his knightly bearing, his contempt for the pettinesses of life? How can I tell him that he is the man of my dreams — how can I do that if he stops me at once with some joke?

POIRIER. That shows the boy is in a good humour.

VERDELET. No: it's because his wife bores him. —

POIRIER. [*To ANTOINETTE*] Do you bore your husband? —

ANTOINETTE. I'm afraid I do!

POIRIER. I tell you it isn't you, but his own confounded laziness that bores him. A husband doesn't love his wife very long when he has nothing else to do but to love her.

ANTOINETTE. Is that true, Tony?

POIRIER. I'm telling you! You needn't ask Verdelet. —

VERDELET. Yes, I do believe that passion is soon exhausted unless it is managed like a fortune: economically.

POIRIER. Every man wants to be actively engaged in some pursuit. When his way is barred, that desire is wasted, lost.

VERDELET. A wife should be the preoccupation, not the occupation, of her husband.

POIRIER. Why did I always adore your mother? Because I never had time to think about her!

VERDELET. Your husband has twenty-four hours a day to love you —

POIRIER. That's twelve too many.

ANTOINETTE. You're opening my eyes.

POIRIER. Let him take a position, and everything will turn out satisfactorily.

ANTOINETTE. What do you say, Tony?

VERDELET. Possibly! The difficulty is in making him take the position.

POIRIER. Leave that to me. Leave the matter in my hands.

VERDELET. Are you going to attack the question at once?

POIRIER. No, but I shall after lunch. I have noticed that the Marquis is in splendid humour after his meals.

Enter GASTON and the DUKE

GASTON. [*Introducing the DUKE to his wife*] My dear Antoinette, Monsieur de Montmeyran, who is not entirely unknown to you.

ANTOINETTE. Gaston has told me so much about you, Monsieur, that I seem to be shaking hands with an old friend.

DUKE. You are not mistaken, Madame; you have made me feel that only a moment was necessary to resume, as it were, a former friendship. [*Aside to the MARQUIS*] Your wife is charming!

GASTON. [*Aside to the DUKE*] Yes, she is nice. [*To ANTOINETTE*] I have some good news for you: Hector is going to stay with us during his leave.

ANTOINETTE. How good of you, Monsieur! I trust your leave is a long one?

DUKE. One month, after which I return to Africa.

VERDELET. You afford us a noble example, Monsieur le duc: *you* do not consider laziness a family inheritance.

GASTON. [*Aside*] Aha! Monsieur Verdelet!

Enter a SERVANT, carrying a picture.

SERVANT. This picture has just come for Monsieur le marquis.

GASTON. Lay it on that chair, by the window. There — good. [*The SERVANT goes out*] Just look at it, Montmeyran.

DUKE. Charming — beautiful evening effect! Don't you think so, Madame?

ANTOINETTE. Yes — charming — and how real it is! And how calm and quiet! You feel as if you would like to walk about in that silent landscape.

POIRIER. [*Aside to VERDELET*] ~~Peer of France!~~

GASTON. Just look at that strip of greenish light, running between the orange tones of the horizon, and that cold blue of the rest of the sky. Splendid technique!

DUKE. Then the foreground! And the colouring, the handling of the whole thing!

GASTON. Then the almost imperceptible reflection of that little spot of water behind the foliage — charming!

POIRIER. Let's take a look at it, Verdelet. [*POIRIER and VERDELET go to look at the picture*] Well? What does it represent?

VERDELET. It represents some fields at nine o'clock at night.

POIRIER. The subject isn't interesting; it doesn't tell anything. In my room I have an engraving showing a dog on the seashore barking at a sailor's hat. There now, you can understand that: it's clever, and simple, and touching.

GASTON. My dear Monsieur Poirier, if you like touching pictures, let me have one made for you; the subject I take from

nature: on the table is a little onion, cut in quarters, a poor little white onion. The knife lies beside it. Nothing at all, and yet it brings tears to the eyes!

VERDELET. [*Aside to POIRIER*] He's making fun of you.

POIRIER. [*Aside to VERDELET*] Very well — let him!

DUKE. Who painted this landscape?

GASTON. Poor devil — lots of talent — but he hasn't a sou.

POIRIER. What did you pay for the picture?

GASTON. Fifty louis.

POIRIER. Fifty louis? For the picture of an unknown painter who is dying of hunger! If you'd gone around at meal-time you could have got it for twenty-five francs.

ANTOINETTE. Oh, father!

POIRIER. A fine example of misplaced generosity!

GASTON. Then you don't think that the arts should be protected?

POIRIER. Protect the arts as much as you like, but not the artists — they're all rascals or debauchees. Why, the stories they tell about them are enough to raise the hair on your head, things I couldn't repeat to my own daughter.

VERDELET. [*Aside to POIRIER*] What?

POIRIER. [*Aside to VERDELET*] They say, old man, that — [*He takes VERDELET to one side and whispers to him*]

VERDELET. And do you believe things of that kind?

POIRIER. The people who told me knew what they were talking about.

Enter a SERVANT.

SERVANT. Dinner is served.

POIRIER. [*To the SERVANT*] Bring up a bottle of 1811 Pomard — [*To the DUKE*] The year of the comet, Monsieur le duc — fifteen francs a bottle! The king drinks no better. [*Aside to VERDELET*] You mustn't drink any — neither will I!

GASTON. [*To the DUKE*] Fifteen francs, bottle to be returned when empty!

VERDELET. [*Aside to POIRIER*] Are you going to allow him to make fun of you like that?

POIRIER. [*Aside to VERDELET*] In matters of this sort, you must take your time. [*They all go out*]

CURTAIN

SECOND ACT

The scene is the same. As the curtain rises, VERDELET, POIRIER, GASTON, the DUKE, and ANTOINETTE, enter from the dining-room.

GASTON. Well, Hector, what do you say? This is the house, and this is what we do every mortal day. Can you imagine a happier man on earth than myself?

DUKE. I must confess that you make me very envious; you almost reconcile me to the idea of marriage.

ANTOINETTE. [*Aside to VERDELET*] Charming young man, that Duke de Montmeyran, isn't he?

VERDELET. [*Aside to ANTOINETTE*] Yes, I like him.

GASTON. Monsieur Poirier, I must say, you are an excellent soul. Believe me, I'm not in the least ungrateful to you.

POIRIER. Oh, Monsieur le marquis!

GASTON. Come, now, call me Gaston. Ah, Monsieur Verdelet, I am delighted to see you.

ANTOINETTE. He is a member of the family, dear.

GASTON. Shake hands, Uncle!

VERDELET. [*Shaking hands with GASTON — aside*] He's not so bad after all

GASTON. You can't deny, Hector, that I'm downright lucky. Monsieur Poirier, something has been weighing on my conscience. You know, you think of nothing but how to make my existence one long series of good times. Will you never

give me a chance to repay you? Try, now, I beg you, to think of something I might do for you in return — anything in my power.

POIRIER. Well, since you're in so good a humour, let me have a quarter of an hour's conversation with you — a serious conversation.

DUKE. I shall be glad to retire —

POIRIER. Oh, please don't, Monsieur; be good enough to stay with us. This is going to be a kind of family council. You are not at all in the way, any more than is Monsieur Verdelet.

GASTON. What the devil, father-in-law! A family council! Are you going to have me put under a legal advisor?

POIRIER. Far from it, my dear Gaston. Let us sit down.
[*They all seat themselves.*]

GASTON. Monsieur Poirier has the floor.

POIRIER. You say you are happy, my dear Gaston. That is the finest recompense I could have.

GASTON. I ask nothing better than to increase my gratitude twofold.

POIRIER. You have spent three months of your honeymoon in the lap of idleness and luxury, and I think that that part of the romance is enough. It's now time to give your attention to hard facts.

GASTON. You talk like a book, I do declare! Very well, let us give our attention to history.

POIRIER. What do you intend to do?

GASTON. Today?

POIRIER. And tomorrow — in the future. You surely have some idea?

GASTON. Of course: today I intend to do what I did yesterday; tomorrow what I did today. I'm not capricious, even though I may appear light-hearted. So long as the future promises to be as bright as the present, I am content.

POIRIER. And yet you are far too reasonable a man to believe that the honeymoon can last forever.

GASTON. Exactly: too reasonable, and too well posted an astronomy — but of course, you have read Heinrich Heine?

POIRIER. You have, haven't you, Verdelet?

VERDELET. I admit I have.

POIRIER. Yes, he passed his school-days playing truant.

GASTON. Well, when Heinrich Heine was asked what became of all the full moons, he replied that they were broken in pieces and made into stars.

POIRIER. I don't quite see —

GASTON. When our honeymoon grows old we shall break it up, and there will remain enough fragments to make a whole Milky Way.

POIRIER. Very pretty idea, I suppose.

DUKE. The sole merit of which is its extreme simplicity.

POIRIER. But, seriously, son-in-law, doesn't this lazy life you are leading seem to threaten the happiness of a young household?

GASTON. Not in the least.

VERDELET. A man of your ability shouldn't be always condemned to a life of inactivity.

GASTON. Ah, but one can resign himself to —

ANTOINETTE. Aren't you afraid that in time you may be bored, dear —?

GASTON. You fail to do yourself justice, my dear.

ANTOINETTE. I am not vain enough to believe that I can be everything in your life, and I must confess that I should be very happy to see you follow Monsieur de Montmeyran's example.

GASTON. Do you mean that I should enlist?

ANTOINETTE. Oh, no.

GASTON. Then, what —?

POIRIER. We want you to take a position worthy of your name.

GASTON. There are but three: in the army, the church, and agriculture. Choose.

POIRIER. We all owe our services to France: she is our mother.

VERDELET. I can readily understand the sorrow of a son who sees his mother re-marry; I can sympathise with his not joining in the wedding festivities; but if he is honest and sincere, he will not blame the mother. And if the second husband makes the mother happy, the son cannot with a good conscience help offering the second husband his hand.

POIRIER. The nobility won't always keep away as it does now; it's even beginning to recognise the fact already. More than one great noble has given a good example: Monsieur de Valchevrière, Monsieur de Chazerolles, Monsieur de Mont-Louis.

GASTON. Those gentlemen did what they thought best. I am not judging them, but I cannot emulate them.

ANTOINETTE. Why not, dear?

GASTON. Ask Montmeyran.

VERDELET. Monsieur le duc's uniform answers for him.

DUKE. Allow me, Monsieur: the soldier has but one idea: to obey; but one adversary: the enemy.

POIRIER. Still, Monsieur, I might answer that —

GASTON. Let us drop the subject, Monsieur Poirier; this is not a question of politics. We may discuss opinions, never sentiments. I am bound by gratitude: my fidelity is that of a servant and of a friend. Let us say no more about this. [To the DUKE] I beg your pardon, my dear fellow, but this is the first time we have talked politics here, and I promise it will be the last.

DUKE. [Aside to ANTOINETTE] You have been led into an indiscretion, Madame!

ANTOINETTE. [Aside to the DUKE] I realise it — only too late!

GASTON. I bear you no malice, Monsieur Poirier. I have been a trifle direct, but I am dreadfully thin-skinned on that subject, and, doubtless without intending it, you have scratched me. I don't blame you, however. Shake hands. —

POIRIER. You're only too good!

VERDELET. [Aside to POIRIER] This is a pretty mess!

POIRIER. [*Aside to VERDELET*] First attack repulsed, but I'm not lifting the siege.

Enter a SERVANT.

SERVANT. There are some people in the small waiting-room who say they have an appointment with Monsieur Poirier.

POIRIER. Very well. Ask them to wait a moment. I'll be there directly. [*The SERVANT goes out*] Your creditors, son-in-law.

GASTON. Yours, my dear father-in-law. I have given them to you.

DUKE. For a wedding present.

VERDELET. Goodby, Monsieur le marquis.

GASTON. Are you leaving us so soon?

VERDELET. Very good of you. Antoinette has asked me to do something for her.

POIRIER. Well! What?

VERDELET. It's a secret between us.

GASTON. You know, if I were inclined to be jealous —

ANTOINETTE. But you are not.

GASTON. Is that a reproach? Very well, Monsieur Verdelet, I have made up my mind to be jealous, and I ask you in the name of the law to unveil the mystery!

VERDELET. You are the last person in the world whom I should think of telling!

GASTON. And why, please?

VERDELET. You are Antoinette's right hand, and the right hand should not know what —

GASTON. The left gives. You are right, I am indiscreet. Allow me to pay my indemnity. [*He gives his purse to ANTOINETTE*] Put this with your own, my dear child.

ANTOINETTE. Thank you on behalf of my poor.

POIRIER. [*Aside*] He is mighty generous!

DUKE. Will you allow me, too, Madame, to steal a few blessings from you? [*He also gives her his purse*] It is not heavy, but it the corporal's mite.

ANTOINETTE. Offered with the heart of a true duke.

POIRIER. [*Aside*] Hasn't a sou to his name, and he gives to charity!

VERDELET. Aren't you going to add something, Poirier?

POIRIER. I've already given a thousand francs to the charity organization.

VERDELET. I see. Good day, Messieurs. Your names won't appear on the lists, but your charity won't be any the less good. [*He goes out with ANTOINETTE*]

POIRIER. See you later, Monsieur le marquis; I'm going to pay your creditors.

GASTON. Now, Monsieur Poirier, simply because those fellows have lent me money is no reason why you should think you must be polite with them. They're unconscionable rascals. You must have had something to do with them, Hector — old Père Salomon, Monsieur Chevassus, Monsieur Cogne?

DUKE. Did I! They're the first Arabs I ever had anything to do with. Lent me money at fifty per cent.

POIRIER. Highway robbery! And you were fool enough — I beg your pardon, Monsieur le duc — I beg your pardon!

DUKE. What else could I do? Ten thousand francs at two per cent. is nearer usury than nothing at all at five per cent.

POIRIER. But, Monsieur, there is a law against usury.

DUKE. Which the usurers respect and obey; they take only legal interest, but you get only one-half the face value of the note in cash, you see.

POIRIER. And the other half?

DUKE. Stuffed lizards, as in Molière's time. Usurers do not progress: they were born perfect.

GASTON. Like the Chinese.

POIRIER. I hope, son-in-law, that you haven't borrowed at any such outrageous rate?

GASTON. I hope so too, father-in-law.

POIRIER. At fifty per cent!

GASTON. No more, no less.

POIRIER. And did you get stuffed lizards?

F.W.T.

GASTON. Any number.

POIRIER. Why didn't you tell me sooner? I could have come to an agreement with them before the marriage.

GASTON. That is precisely what I did not want. Would it not be fine to see the Marquis de Presles buying back his pledged word, insulting his noble name!

POIRIER. But if you owe only half the amount —?

GASTON. I received only half, but I owe the whole. I don't owe the money to those thieves, but to my own signature.

POIRIER. Allow me, Monsieur le marquis — I believe I may say that I am an honest man; I have never cheated anyone out of a single sou, and I am incapable of advising you to do something underhand, but it appears to me that in paying back those scoundrels their principal at six per cent., you will have acted in an honourable and scrupulous way.

GASTON. This is not a question of honesty, but of honour.

POIRIER. What difference do you see between the two?

GASTON. Honour is a gentleman's honesty. —

POIRIER. So, virtues change names when you want to put them into practice? You polish up their vulgarity in order to use them for yourself? I'm surprised at only one thing: that what is called the nose on a nobleman's face deigns to be called by the same name when it happens to be on a tradesman's face!

GASTON. That is because all noses are similar. —

DUKE. Within six inches!

POIRIER. Then don't you think that men are? —

GASTON. It's a question.

POIRIER. Which was decided long ago, Monsieur le marquis.

DUKE. Our rights and privileges have been abolished, but not our duties. Of all that remains to us there are only two words, but they are words which nothing can snatch from us: *Noblesse oblige!* No matter what happens, we shall abide by a code more severe than the law, that mysterious code which we call honour.

POIRIER. Well, Monsieur le marquis, it is very fortunate

practical ↗

for ~~your honour that my honesty pays your debts~~. Only as I am not a gentleman, I warn you that I shall do my best to get out of this fix as cheaply as I can.

GASTON. You must be very clever indeed to make any sort of compromise with those highway robbers: they are masters of the situation.

Re-enter ANTOINETTE.

POIRIER. We'll see, we'll see. [*Aside*] I have an idea: I'm going to play my own little game. [*Aloud*] I'll go at once, so that they shan't get impatient.

DUKE. No, don't wait; they will devour you if you do.

POIRIER goes out.

GASTON. Poor Monsieur Poirier, I feel sorry for him. This latest revelation takes away all his pleasure at paying my debts.

DUKE. Listen to me: there are very few people who know how to be robbed. It is an art worthy a great lord.

Enter a SERVANT.

SERVANT. Messieurs de Ligny and de Chazerolles would like to speak to Monsieur le marquis on behalf of Monsieur de Pontgrimaud.

GASTON. Very well. [*The SERVANT goes out*] You receive the gentlemen, Hector. You don't need me to help you arrange the party.

ANTOINETTE. A party —?

GASTON. Yes, I won a good deal of money from Pontgrimaud, and I promised him a chance to take revenge. [*To HECTOR*] Tomorrow, some time in the morning, will be satisfactory for me.

DUKE. [*Aside to GASTON*] When shall I see you again?

GASTON. [*Aside to HECTOR*] Madame de Montjay is expecting me. At three, then, here. [*The DUKE goes out*]

GASTON. [*Sitting on a sofa, he opens a magazine, yawns and says to his wife*] Would you like to go to the *Italiens* tonight?

ANTOINETTE. Yes, if you are going.

GASTON. I am. What gown are you going to wear?

ANTOINETTE. Any one you like.

GASTON. It makes no difference to me — I mean, you look very pretty in any of them.

ANTOINETTE. But you have such excellent taste, dear; you ought to advise me.

GASTON. I am not a fashion magazine, my dear child; and then, all you have to do is to watch the great ladies, make them your models: Madame de Nohan, Madame de Villepreux —

ANTOINETTE. Madame de Montjay —

GASTON. Why Madame de Montjay, rather than anyone else?

ANTOINETTE. Because she pleases you more.

GASTON. Where did you get that idea?

ANTOINETTE. The other evening at the Opera you paid her a rather long visit in her box. She is very pretty. Is she clever, too?

GASTON. Very. [*A pause*]

ANTOINETTE. Why don't you tell me when I do something that doesn't please you?

GASTON. I have never failed to do so.

ANTOINETTE. You never said you were displeased.

GASTON. Because you never gave me the occasion.

ANTOINETTE. Why, just a few moments ago, when I insisted that you take some position, I know I displeased you.

GASTON. I'd forgotten about that — it doesn't matter.

ANTOINETTE. If I had had any notion what your ideas on that subject were, do you think for an instant that I should have —?

GASTON. Truly, my dear, it almost seems as if you were making excuses.

ANTOINETTE. That is because I am afraid you will think I am childish and vain —

GASTON. What if you were a little proud? Is that a crime?

ANTOINETTE. I swear I haven't an ounce of pride.

GASTON. [*Rising*] My dear, you haven't a single fault. And do you know that you have quite won the admiration of Montmeyran? You ought to be proud of that. Hector is difficult to please.

ANTOINETTE. Less so than you.

GASTON. Do you think me difficult to please? You see, you have some vanity — I've caught you in the act!

ANTOINETTE. I have no illusions about myself: I know very well what I need in order to be worthy of you. But if you will only take the trouble to guide me, tell me something about the ideas of the world you know, I love you so much that I would completely change myself.

GASTON. [*Kissing her hand*] I could not but lose by the change, Madame, and furthermore, I am only a middling teacher. There is but one school in which to learn what you think you lack: society. Study it.

ANTOINETTE. Very well, then, I shall study Madame de Montjay.

GASTON. Again! Are you doing me the honour to be jealous? Take care, my dear, that failing is distinctly bourgeois. You must learn, since you allow me to be your guide, that in our circle marriage does not necessarily mean a home and a household; only the noble and elegant things in life do we have in common among ourselves. When I am not with you, pray do not worry about what I am doing; merely say to yourself, "He is dissipating his imperfections in order that he may bring to me one hour of perfection, or nearly so."

ANTOINETTE. I think that your greatest imperfection is your absence.

GASTON. Neatly turned. Thank you. Who's this? My creditors!

Enter the CREDITORS.

GASTON. You here, Messieurs! You have mistaken the door: the servants' entrance is on the other side.

SALOMON. We didn't want to leave without seeing you, Monsieur le marquis.

GASTON. I can dispense with your thanks.

COGNE. We have come to ask for yours.

CHEVASSUS. You've treated us long enough as usurers.

COGNE. Leeches!

SALOMON. Blood-suckers!

CHEVASSUS. We're delighted to have this occasion to tell you that we are honest men.

GASTON. I fail to see the joke?

COGNE. This is not a joke, Monsieur. We have loaned you money at six per cent.

GASTON. Have my notes not been acquitted in full?

SALOMON. There's a trifle lacking: some two hundred and eighteen thousand francs.

GASTON. What's that?

CHEVASSUS. We were obliged to submit to that!

SALOMON. And your father-in-law insisted on your being sent to the debtors' prison.

GASTON. My father-in-law insisted that ——?

COGNE. Yes, it seems that you have been playing some underhanded trick with him, the poor fellow!

SALOMON. It'll teach him better next time!

COGNE. But meantime, *we* must bear the burden.

GASTON. [*To ANTOINETTE*] Your father, Madame, has behaved in a most undignified way. [*To the CREDITORS*] I confess myself in your debt, Messieurs, but I have an income of only twenty-five thousand francs.

SALOMON. You know very well you can't touch the principal without your wife's consent. We have seen your marriage contract.

COGNE. You're not making your wife very happy ——

GASTON. Leave the house!

SALOMON. You can't kick honest people out of the house like dogs — people who've helped you — [ANTOINETTE *has meantime sat down and is now writing*] — people who believed that the signature of the Marquis de Presles was worth something.

COGNE. And who were mistaken!

CREDITORS. Yes, mistaken!

ANTOINETTE. [*Handing SALOMON a check which she has written*] You are not mistaken, Messieurs: you are paid in full.

GASTON. [*Takes the check, glances at it, and hands it back to SALOMON*] Now that you really are thieves — leave the house! Rascals! Hurry up, or we'll have you swept out!

CREDITORS. Too good of you, Monsieur le marquis! A thousand thanks! [*They go out*]

GASTON. You dear! I adore you! [*He takes her in his arms and kisses her vehemently*]

ANTOINETTE. Dear Gaston!

GASTON. Where in the world did your father find the heart he gave you?

ANTOINETTE. Don't judge my father too severely, dear. He is good and generous, but his ideas are narrow. He can't see beyond his own individual rights. It's the fault of his mind, not his heart. Now, if you consider that I have done my duty, forgive my father for that one moment of agony —

GASTON. I should be very ungrateful to refuse you anything.

ANTOINETTE. You really won't blame him, will you?

GASTON. No, since you wish it, Marquise — Marquise, you hear?

ANTOINETTE. Call me your wife — the only title of which I am proud!

GASTON. You do love me a little?

ANTOINETTE. Haven't you noticed it, ungrateful man?

GASTON. Oh yes, but I like to hear you say it — especially

at this moment. [*The clock strikes three*] Three o'clock!
[*Aside*] The devil! Madame de Montjay is expecting me!

ANTOINETTE. You are smiling — what are you thinking about?

GASTON. Would you like to take a ride with me in the Bois?

ANTOINETTE. Well — I'm not dressed to go.

GASTON. Just throw a shawl over your shoulders. Ring for your maid. [ANTOINETTE rings]

Enter POIRIER.

POIRIER. Well, son-in-law, have you seen your creditors?

GASTON. [*With evident ill-humour*] Yes, Monsieur —

ANTOINETTE. [*Aside to GASTON, as she takes his arm*]
Remember your promise.

GASTON. [*Amiably*] Yes, my dear father-in-law, I have seen them.

Enter the MAID.

ANTOINETTE. [*To the MAID*] Bring me my shawl and hat, and have the horses hitched. [*The MAID goes out*]

GASTON. [*To POIRIER*] Allow me to congratulate you on your good stroke of business; you did play them a very clever trick. [*Aside to ANTOINETTE*] Am I not nice?

POIRIER. You take it better than I thought you would; I was prepared for any number of objections on the score of your "honour."

GASTON. I am reasonable, father-in-law. You have acted according to your own ideas. I have little objection to that; we have acted according to *our* ideas.

POIRIER. What's that?

GASTON. You gave those rascals only the actual sum of money borrowed from them: we have paid the rest.

POIRIER. [*To ANTOINETTE*] What! Did you sign away — ? [ANTOINETTE nods] Good God, what have you done!

ANTOINETTE. I beg your pardon, father —

POIRIER. I've moved Heaven and earth in order to give you a good round sum, and you throw it out of the window! Two hundred and eighteen thousand francs!

GASTON. Don't worry about that, Monsieur Poirier, we are the ones who lose: you receive the benefit. *He utters a sound.*

Re-enter the MAID, with hat and shawl.

ANTOINETTE. Goodby, father, we are going to the Bois.

GASTON. Your arm, wife! [*They go out*]

POIRIER. He gets on my nerves, that son-in-law of mine. I can see very well that I can never get any satisfaction out of him. He's an incurable gentleman! He refuses to do anything, — he's good for nothing — he's a frightful expense — he is master — in my own house. This has got to end. [*He rings. A moment later*]

Enter a SERVANT.

POIRIER. Have the porter and the cook come here. [*The SERVANT goes out*] We'll see, son-in-law. I've been too soft and kind and generous. So you won't give in, my fine friend? Very well, do as you please! Neither will I: you remain a marquis, and I shall remain a bourgeois. I'll at least have the consolation of living as I want to live.

Enter the PORTER.

PORTER. Did Monsieur ask for me?

POIRIER. Yes, François, Monsieur did ask for you. Put up a sign on the house at once.

PORTER. A sign?

POIRIER. "To let, a magnificent apartment on the first floor, with stables and appurtenances."

PORTER. Monsieur le marquis' apartment?

POIRIER. Exactly, François.

PORTER. But Monsieur le marquis gave me no orders!

POIRIER. Idiot, who is master here? Who owns this house?

PORTER. You, Monsieur.

POIRIER. Then do as I tell you. I can dispense with your opinions.

PORTER. Very well, Monsieur. [*The PORTER goes out*]

Enter VATEL.

POIRIER. Hurry, François. — Come here, Monsieur Vatel. You are preparing a grand dinner for tomorrow?

VATEL. Yes, Monsieur, and I may even say that the menu would be no disgrace to my illustrious ancestor. It will be a veritable work of art. Monsieur Poirier will be astonished —

POIRIER. Have you the menu with you?

VATEL. No, Monsieur, it is being copied, but I know it by heart.

POIRIER. Be good enough to recite it to me.

VATEL. *Potage aux ravioles à l'Italienne* and *Potage à l'orge à la Marie Stuart*.

POIRIER. Instead of those two unknown soups you will have ordinary vegetable soup.

VATEL. What, Monsieur?

POIRIER. It is my will. Continue.

VATEL. After the soup: *Carpe du Rhin à la Lithuanienne*, *Poulardes à la Godard*, *Filet de bœuf braisé aux raisins à la Napolitaine*, Westphalian ham, Madeira sauce.

POIRIER. Here's an easier and much healthier after-soup course for you: brill with caper sauce; Bayonne ham with spinach; larded veal with gooseberries; and rabbit.

VATEL. But, Monsieur Poirier, I shall never consent to —

POIRIER. I am master here, do you understand? Continue.

VATEL. *Entrées: Filets de volaille à la concordat — Croustades de truffes garnies de foie à la royale; Stuffed pheasants à la Montpensier, Red partridges farcis à la bohémienne.*

POIRIER. Instead of these entrées we'll have nothing at all. Let's proceed at once to the roasts. That's the important part.

VATEL. But this is against all the precepts of the art.

POIRIER. I'll take the responsibility for that. Now, what are your roasts?

VATEL. There is no use going any further, Monsieur; my ancestor thrust a sword through his heart for a lesser insult. I resign.

POIRIER. I was just going to ask you to do that, old man. Of course, you still have a week here, while I can look for another servant —

VATEL. A servant! Monsieur, I am a chef!

POIRIER. I am going to replace you by a woman-cook. Meantime, during the week when you are in my service, you will be good enough to execute my orders.

VATEL. I would rather blow my brains out than be false to my name!

POIRIER. [*Aside*] Another stickler for his name! [*Aloud*] Blow your brains out, Monsieur Vatel, but be careful not to burn my sauces. Good day to you. [*VATEL goes out*] And now I'm going to invite some of my old friends from the Rue des Bourdonnais. Monsieur le marquis de Presles, we are going to make you come down a few pegs! [*He goes out humming the first verse of "Monsieur et Madame Denis"*]

CURTAIN

THIRD ACT

The scene is the same. GASTON and ANTOINETTE are present.

GASTON. What a delightful ride! Charming Spring weather! You might almost think it was April!

ANTOINETTE. Really, weren't you too bored?

GASTON. With you, my dear? As a matter of fact, you are the most charming woman I know. *excellent*

ANTOINETTE. Compliments, Monsieur?

GASTON. Oh no: the truth in its most brutal form. And what a delightful journey I made into your mind and heart.

How many undiscovered points I have found! Why, I have been living near you without knowing you, like a Parisian in Paris.

ANTOINETTE. And I don't displease you too much?

GASTON. It is my place to ask you that question. I feel like a peasant who has been entertaining a disguised queen: all at once the queen puts on her crown and the peasant feels embarrassed and makes excuses for not having been more attentive and hospitable.

ANTOINETTE. Be assured, good peasant, that your queen blames nothing except her own incognito.

GASTON. For having kept it so long, cruel queen? Was it out of sheer coquetry, and to have another honeymoon? You have succeeded. Hitherto I have been only your husband; now I want to become your lover.

ANTOINETTE. No, my dear Gaston, remain my husband. I think that a woman can cease to love her lover, never her husband.

GASTON. Ah, so you are not romantic?

ANTOINETTE. I am, but in my own way. My ideas on the subject are perhaps not fashionable, but they are deeply rooted in me, like childhood impressions. When I was a little girl, I could never understand how it was that my father and mother weren't related, and ever since then, marriage has seemed to me the tenderest and closest of all relationships. To love a man who is not my husband, seems contrary to nature.

GASTON. The ideas rather of a Roman matron, my dear Antoinette, but keep them, for the sake of my honour and my happiness.

ANTOINETTE. Take care! There is another side: I am jealous, I warn you. If there is only one man in the world whom I can love, I must have all his love. The day I discover that this is not so, I shall make no complaint or reproach, but the link will be broken. At once my husband will become a stranger to me — I should consider myself a widow.

GASTON. [*Aside*] The devil! [*Aloud*] Fear nothing,

dear Antoinette, we shall live like two lovers, like Philemon and Baucis—with the exception of the hut. — You don't insist on the hut, do you?

ANTOINETTE. Not in the least.

GASTON. I am going to hold a brilliant celebration of our wedding, and I want you to eclipse all the other women and make all the men envious of me.

ANTOINETTE. Must we proclaim our happiness so loud? — ✕

GASTON. Don't you like entertainments?


ANTOINETTE. I like everything that you like. Are we going to have company at dinner today?

GASTON. No—tomorrow. Today we have only Montneyran. Why did you ask?

ANTOINETTE. Should I dress?

GASTON. Yes, because I want you to make married life attractive to Hector. Go now, my dear child. I shan't forget this happy day!

ANTOINETTE. How happy I am! [*She goes out*]

GASTON. There is no denying the fact: she is prettier than Madame de Montjay. Devil take me if I am not falling in love with my wife! Love is like good fortune: while we seek it afar, it is waiting for us at home. 

Enter POIRIER.

Well, my dear father-in-law, how are you taking your little disappointment? Are you still angry on account of the money? Have you decided to do something?

POIRIER. I have.

GASTON. Something violent?

POIRIER. Something necessary.

GASTON. Might I be so indiscreet as to inquire what?

POIRIER. On the contrary, Monsieur, I even owe you an explanation. When I gave you my daughter together with a million francs' dowry, I never for a moment thought that you would refuse to take a position.

GASTON. Please let's drop that subject.

POIRIER. I merely wanted to remind you. I confess I was wrong in thinking that a gentleman would ever consent to work like a man; I own my mistake. As a result of that mistake, however, I have allowed you to run my house on a scale which I can't myself keep up with; and since it is understood that my fortune alone is our only source of income, it seems to me just, reasonable, and necessary, to cut down, because I see I have no hope of any further increase in revenue. I therefore thought of making a few reforms, which you will undoubtedly approve.

GASTON. Proceed, Sully! Go on, Turgot! Cut, slash! You find me in splendid humour! Take advantage of the fact.

POIRIER. I am most delighted at your condescension. I have, I say, decided, resolved, commanded —

GASTON. I beg your pardon, father-in-law, but if you have decided, resolved, commanded, it seems quite superfluous for you to consult me.

POIRIER. I am not consulting you; I am merely telling — you the facts.

GASTON. So you are not consulting me?

POIRIER. Are you surprised?

GASTON. A little, but, as I told you, I am in splendid humour.

POIRIER. Well, the first reform, my dear boy —

GASTON. You mean, your dear Gaston, I think? A slip of the tongue!

POIRIER. Dear Gaston, dear boy — all the same. Some familiarity between father-in-law and son-in-law is allowed, — doubtless?

GASTON. And on your part, Monsieur Poirier, it flatters and honours me. You were about to say that your first reform — ?

POIRIER. That you, Monsieur, do me the favour to stop making fun of me. I'm tired of being the butt of all your jokes.

GASTON. Now, now, Monsieur Poirier, don't be angry.

POIRIER. I know very well that you think I'm of little account, that I'm not very intelligent, but —

GASTON. Where did you get that idea?

POIRIER. But let me tell you, there is more brains in my little finger than there is in your whole body.

GASTON. This is ridiculous —

POIRIER. I'm no Marquis!

GASTON. Hush! Not so loud! Someone might believe it!

POIRIER. It makes no difference to me whether they do or not. I don't pretend to be a gentleman, thank God! It's — not worth troubling my mind about.

GASTON. Not worth troubling about?

POIRIER. No, Monsieur, no! I'm an old dyed-in-the-wool Liberal, that's what I am, and I judge men on their merits, and not according to their titles. I laugh at the mere accident of birth. The nobility doesn't dazzle me: I think no more of it than I do of the Judgment Day. I'm delighted to have this occasion of telling you so.

GASTON. Do you think I have merits?

POIRIER. No, Monsieur, I do not.

GASTON. No? Then why did you give me your daughter?

POIRIER. Why did I — ?

GASTON. Possibly you had some afterthought?

POIRIER. (*Embarrassed*) Afterthought?

GASTON. Allow me: your daughter did not love me when you brought me to your home; and certainly it was not my debts which appealed to you, and which caused the honour of your — choice to fall upon me. Now, since it was not my title either, — I am forced to assume that you must have had some afterthought.

POIRIER. And what of it, Monsieur? What if I did try to combine my own interest with my daughter's happiness? Where would be the harm? Who could blame me, I who gave a million right out of my pocket, for choosing a son-in-law who could in some way pay me back for my sacrifice — My daughter

loved you, didn't she? I thought of her first; that was my duty, in fact, my right.

GASTON. I don't contest that, Monsieur Poirier, I only say that you were wrong in one respect: not to have confided in me.

POIRIER. Well, you are not a very encouraging sort of man.

GASTON. Are you blaming me for my occasional jokes at your expense? Possibly I am not the most respectful son-in-law in the world; I admit it, only allow me to state that in serious matters I know how to be serious. It is only right that you were looking for the support which you have not found in me.

POIRIER. [*Aside*] Can he really have understood the situation?

GASTON. Look here, my dear father-in-law, can I help you in any way? That is, if I am good for anything?

POIRIER. Well, I once dreamed of being introduced at Court.

GASTON. Ah, so you still have that desire to dance at court?

POIRIER. It's not a matter of dancing. Do me the honour of thinking me not quite so frivolous as that. I am not vain or trivial.

GASTON. Then in the name of Heaven, what are you? Explain yourself.

POIRIER. [*Piteously*] I am ambitious.

GASTON. Why, you're not blushing, are you? Why? With all the experience you have acquired in the realm of business, you might well aspire to any heights! Commerce is the true school for statesmanship.

POIRIER. That's what Verdelet was telling me only this morning. No you did not

GASTON. That is where one can obtain a high and grand view of things, and stand detached from the petty interests which — that is the sort of condition from which your Richelieus and Colberts sprang.

POIRIER. Oh, I don't pretend — I

GASTON. Now, my good Monsieur Poirier, what would suit you? A prefecture? Nonsense! Council of State? Nor diplomatic service? Let me see, the Turkish embassy is vacant at present —

POIRIER. I'm a stay-at-home — and then I don't understand Turkish.

GASTON. Wait! [*Striking POIRIER on the shoulder*] The peerage — it would fit you to a T.

POIRIER. Oh! Do you really think so?

GASTON. That's the trouble: you don't fall into any category, you see. You're not a member of the Institute?

POIRIER. Oh, don't worry about that. I'll pay — three thousand francs, if necessary — direct contributions. I have three millions now at the bank; they await only a word from you to be put into good land.

GASTON. Ah, Machiavelli! Sixtus VI! You'll outstrip them all!

POIRIER. Yes, I think I will!

GASTON. But I sincerely hope your ambition will not stop there? You must have a title.

POIRIER. Oh, I don't insist on such vain baubles. I'm an old Liberal, as I told you.

GASTON. All the more reason. A Liberal must despise only the nobility of the old régime; now, the new nobility, which has no ancestors —

POIRIER. The nobility that owes everything to itself —

GASTON. You might be a count.

POIRIER. No, I'll be reasonable about it: a baronetcy would suffice.

GASTON. Baron Poirier! Sounds well!

POIRIER. Yes, Baron Poirier!

GASTON. [*Looks at POIRIER and then bursts out laughing*] I beg your pardon! But — really — this is too funny! Baron — ! Monsieur Poirier! Baron de Catillard — !

POIRIER. [*Aside*] He's been making fun of me!

GASTON. [*Calling*] Come here, Hector!

Enter the DUKE.

Come here! Do you know why Jean Gaston de Presles received three wounds from an arquebuse at the Battle of Ivry? Do you know why François Gaston de Presles led the attack on La Rochelle? Why Louis Gaston de Presles was blown to pieces at La Hogue? Why Philippe Gaston de Presles captured two flags at Fontenoy? Why my grandfather gave up his life at Quiberon? It was all in order that some day Monsieur Poirier might be peer of France and a baron!

DUKE. What do you mean?

GASTON. This is the secret of that little attack on me this morning.

DUKE. [*Aside*] I see!

POIRIER. And do you know, Monsieur le duc, why I have worked fourteen hours a day for thirty years? Why I heaped up, sou by sou, four millions of cash, while I deprived myself of everything but bare necessities? It was all in order that some day Monsieur le marquis Gaston de Presles, who neither died at Quiberon, nor at Fontenoy, nor at La Hogue, nor anywhere else, might die of old age on a feather-bed, after having spent his life doing nothing at all.

DUKE. Well said, Monsieur!

GASTON. You are cut out for an orator!

Enter a SERVANT.

SERVANT. There are some gentlemen here who would like to see the apartment.

GASTON. What apartment?

SERVANT. Monsieur le marquis'.

GASTON. Do they think this a natural history museum?

POIRIER. [*To the SERVANT*] Tell the gentlemen to call again. [*The SERVANT goes out*] Pardon me, son-in-law, I was so carried away by your gayety that I forgot to mention that I am renting the first floor of my house.

GASTON. What's that?

POIRIER. That is one of the little reforms I was speaking about.

GASTON. And where do you intend to lodge me?

POIRIER. On the floor above: the apartment is large enough for us all.

GASTON. A Noah's Ark!

POIRIER. Of course, it goes without saying that I am renting the stables and carriages, too.

GASTON. And my horses — are you going to lodge them on the second floor?

POIRIER. You will sell them.

GASTON. And go on foot?

DUKE. It will do you good; you don't do half enough walking.

POIRIER. I shall however keep my own blue coupé. I'll lend it to you when you need it.

DUKE. When the weather is nice!

GASTON. Now, see here, Monsieur Poirier, this is — I —

Enter a SERVANT.

SERVANT. Monsieur Vatel would like to speak a word with Monsieur le marquis.

GASTON. Tell him to come in.

Enter VATEL, dressed in black.

What does this mean, Monsieur Vatel? Are you going to a funeral? And on the eve of battle!

VATEL. The position in which I have been placed is such that I am forced to desert in order to escape dishonour. Will Monsieur le marquis kindly cast his eyes over the menu which Monsieur Poirier has imposed upon me!

GASTON. Monsieur Poirier imposed on you? Let us see. *[Reading]* "Lapin sauté"!

POIRIER. My old friend Ducaillou's favourite dish.

GASTON. Stuffed turkey and chestnuts.

POIRIER. My old comrade Groschenet is very fond of it.

GASTON. Are you entertaining the whole Rue des Bourdonnais?

POIRIER. Together with the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

GASTON. I accept your resignation, Monsieur Vatel.
[VATEL goes out] So, tomorrow my friends are to have the honour of meeting yours?

POIRIER. Exactly, they will have that honour. Monsieur le duc will not, I hope, feel humiliated at having to eat my soup as he sits between Monsieur and Madame Pincebourde?

DUKE. Not at all. This little debauch is not in the least displeasing. Undoubtedly Madame Pincebourde will sing during the dessert?

GASTON. And after dinner we shall have a game of Piquet, too?

DUKE. Or Lotto.

POIRIER. Pope Joan also.

GASTON. And I trust we shall repeat the debauch from time to time?

POIRIER. My home will be open every evening, and your friends will always find a welcome there.

GASTON. Really, Monsieur Poirier, your home will soon become a centre of marvellous pleasures, a miniature Capua. But I am afraid I should become a slave of luxury and I shall therefore leave no later than tomorrow.

POIRIER. I am sorry to hear it, but my home is not a prison. What career do you intend to follow? Medicine or Law?

GASTON. Who said anything about a career?

POIRIER. Or will you enter the Department of Roads and Bridges? For you will certainly be unable to keep up your rank on nine thousand francs' income?

GASTON. Nine thousand francs' income?

POIRIER. Well, the account is easy to make out: you received five hundred thousand francs as my daughter's dowry. The wedding and installation took about a hundred thousand. You have just given two hundred and eighteen thousand to your creditors; you have therefore one hundred and eighty-two

thousand left which, at the usual interest, will yield you nine thousand francs' income. You see? On that can you supply your friends with *Carpe à la Lithuanienne* and *Volailles à la concordat*? Take my word for it, my dear Gaston, stay with me; you will be more comfortable than in a home of your own. Think of your children, who will not be sorry some day to find in the pockets of the Marquis de Presles the savings of old man Poirier. Goodby, son-in-law, I'm going to settle accounts with Monsieur Vatel. [POIRIER goes out]

GASTON. [As he and the DUKE exchange glances and the DUKE bursts into peals of laughter] You think it funny, do you?

DUKE. Indeed I do! So this is the modest and generous fruit-tree of a father-in-law! This Georges Dandin! At last you've found your master, old man. In the name of Heaven, don't look so miserable! See there, you look like a prince starting on a Crusade, turning back because of the rain! Smile a little, this isn't so tragic after all!

GASTON. You are right. Monsieur Poirier, you are rendering me a great service that you little dream of!

DUKE. A service?

GASTON. Yes, my dear fellow. I was about to make a fool of myself: fall in love with my wife. Fortunately, Monsieur Poirier has put a stop to that.

DUKE. Your wife is not to blame for the stupidity of her father. She is charming!—

GASTON. Nonsense! She's just like her father! —

DUKE. Not the least bit, I tell you!

GASTON. There is a family resemblance — I insist! I couldn't kiss her without thinking of the old fool. Now, I *did* want to sit at home with my wife by the fireside, but the moment it is to be a kitchen fireside — [He takes out his watch] Good evening!

DUKE. Where are you going?

GASTON. To Madame de Montjay's; she's been waiting two hours already.

DUKE. Gaston, don't go.

GASTON. They want to make my life a hardship for me here, make me feel penitent —

DUKE. Listen to me!

GASTON. You can't persuade me.

DUKE. What about your duel?

GASTON. That's so — I'd forgotten about that.

DUKE. You are going to fight tomorrow at two in the Bois de Vincennes.

GASTON. Very well. With this humour on me, Pont-grimaud is going to spend a nice fifteen minutes tomorrow!

Enter VERDELET and ANTOINETTE.

ANTOINETTE. Are you going out, dear?

GASTON. Yes, Madame, I am going out. [*He goes out*]

VERDELET. Well, Toinon, his humour isn't quite so charming as you described it?

ANTOINETTE. I don't understand why — ?

DUKE. Very serious things are happening, Madame.

ANTOINETTE. What?

DUKE. Your father is ambitious.

VERDELET. Poirier ambitious?

DUKE. He was counting on his son-in-law's title to —

VERDELET. Get into the peerage — like Monsieur Michaud! [*Aside*] Old fool!

DUKE. He's adopted childish measures in retaliation, after Gaston refused to help him. I'm afraid it is you, however, who will bear the expenses of the war.

ANTOINETTE. How do you mean?

VERDELET. It's only too simple: if your father is making the house disagreeable to your husband, he will seek distraction elsewhere.

ANTOINETTE. Distraction elsewhere?

DUKE. Monsieur Verdelet has put his finger on the spot. You, Madame, are the only person who can forestall a disaster. If your father loves you, you must stand between him and

Gaston. Make a truce between them at once. There is no harm done yet, and everything can be as it was.

ANTOINETTE. No harm done yet? Everything can be as it was? You make me very much afraid. Against whom am I to defend myself?

DUKE. Against your father.

ANTOINETTE. No! You are not telling me everything. What my father has done is not enough to take my husband from me in the space of a single day. He's making love to some woman, is he not?

DUKE. No, Madame, but —

ANTOINETTE. Please, Monsieur le duc, don't try to hide the truth. I have a rival!

DUKE. Do calm yourself!

ANTOINETTE. I feel it, I know it! He is with her now!

DUKE. No, Madame: he loves you.

ANTOINETTE. But he has just come to know me since an hour ago. Ha, it wasn't to me that he felt he must tell of his anger — he went elsewhere with his troubles!

VERDELET. Now, now, Toinon, don't get so excited. He went out for a walk, that's all. That was what I always did when Poirier made me angry.

Enter a SERVANT carrying a letter on a silver plate.

SERVANT. A letter for Monsieur le marquis.

ANTOINETTE. He has gone out. Lay it there. [*The SERVANT lays the letter on a table. ANTOINETTE looks at it, and says, aside*] A woman's hand! [*Aloud*] From whom does this come?

SERVANT. Madame de Montjay's footman brought it. [*He goes out*]

ANTOINETTE. [*Aside*] Madame de Montjay!

DUKE. I shall see Gaston before you, Madame. Would you like me to give him the letter?

ANTOINETTE. Are you afraid I might open it?

DUKE. Oh, Madame!

ANTOINETTE. It must have crossed Gaston.

VERDELET. The idea! Your husband's mistress would never dare write him here!

ANTOINETTE. She would have to despise me not to dare to write to him here. But I don't say she is his mistress. I only say that he is making love to her. I say that because I am positive.

DUKE. But I swear, Madame —

ANTOINETTE. Would you dare swear — seriously swear — Monsieur le duc?

DUKE. ~~My oath would prove nothing, for a gentleman has the right to lie in a case of this sort.~~ No matter what the truth is, I have warned you of the danger and suggested a means of escape. I have done my duty as a friend and an honourable man. Do not ask anything else of me. [*He goes out*]

ANTOINETTE. I have just lost everything I had won in Gaston's affection. An hour ago he called me Marquise, and my father has just brutally recalled the fact to him that I was Mademoiselle Poirier.

VERDELET. Well, is it impossible for anyone to love Mademoiselle Poirier? —

ANTOINETTE. Possibly my own devotion might have touched him, my own love have awakened his. That was already beginning, but my father has stopped it. His mistress! She can't be that yet, can she, Tony? You don't really believe she is, do you?

VERDELET. Certainly not!

ANTOINETTE. I understand how he might have been making love to her for the last few days. But if he is really her lover, then he must have begun the day after our marriage. That would be vile!

VERDELET. Yes, my dear child.

ANTOINETTE. Of course, he didn't marry me with the idea that he would never love me — but he shouldn't have condemned me so soon.

VERDELET. No, of course he shouldn't.

ANTOINETTE. You don't seem to be very sure. You must be mad to suspect a thing of that sort! You know very well my husband wouldn't be capable of it! Tell me—there's no doubt, is there? You don't think him so low?

VERDELET. No!

ANTOINETTE. Then you can swear he is innocent! Swear it, dear Tony, swear it!

VERDELET. I swear it! I swear it!

ANTOINETTE. Why is she writing a letter to him?

VERDELET. It's an invitation, probably, to a party of some sort.

ANTOINETTE. It must be very important, if she sends it by a footman. To think that the secret of my whole future life is in that envelope. Let's go — that letter tempts me — *[She lays the letter, which she has meanwhile picked up, on the table, and stands fixedly looking at it]*

VERDELET. Come, then, you are right. *[She does not move]*

Enter POIRIER.

POIRIER. Why, Antoinette — *[To VERDELET]* What is she looking at? A letter? *[He picks up the letter]*

ANTOINETTE. Leave it there, father, it is addressed to Monsieur de Presles.

POIRIER. *[Looking at the address]* Pretty handwriting! *[He sniffs the letter]* Doesn't smell of tobacco! It's from a woman!

ANTOINETTE. Yes, I know; it's from Madame de Montjay.

POIRIER. How excited you are! You're feverish, aren't you? *[He takes her hand]* You are!

ANTOINETTE. No, father.

POIRIER. Yes, you are. What's the matter? Tell me.

ANTOINETTE. Nothing, I tell you.

VERDELET. *[Aside to Poirier]* Don't worry her. She's jealous.

POIRIER. Are you jealous? Is the Marquis unfaithful to you? By God, if that's so —

ANTOINETTE. Father, dear, if you love me, don't —

POIRIER. If I love you — !

ANTOINETTE. Don't torment Gaston.

POIRIER. Who's tormenting him? I'm just economising, that's all.

VERDELET. You irritate the Marquis, and your daughter suffers for it.

POIRIER. You mind your own business. [*To ANTOINETTE*] What has that man done to you? I must know.

ANTOINETTE. [*Frightened*] Nothing — nothing. Don't quarrel with him, for Heaven's sake!

POIRIER. Then why are you jealous? Why are you looking at that letter, eh? [*He takes the letter*] Do you think that Madame de Montjay — ?

ANTOINETTE. No, no!

POIRIER. She does, doesn't she, Verdelet?

VERDELET. Well, she thinks —

POIRIER. It's very easy to find out — [*He breaks the seal*]

ANTOINETTE. Father! A letter is sacred.⁴

POIRIER. There is nothing so sacred to me as your happiness.

VERDELET. Take care, Poirier. What will your son-in-law say?

POIRIER. I don't care a hang about my son-in-law. [*He opens the letter*]

ANTOINETTE. Please, don't read that letter.

POIRIER. I will read it. If it isn't my right, it is my duty. [*Reading:*] "Dear Gaston —" The blackguard! [*He drops the letter*]

ANTOINETTE. She is his mistress! Oh, God! [*She falls into a chair*]

POIRIER. [*Taking VERDELET by the coat collar*] You allowed me to arrange this marriage!

VERDELET. Oh — this is too much!

POIRIER. When I asked for your advice, why didn't you

oppose me? Why didn't you warn me what was going to happen?

VERDELET. I told you twenty times — but, no, Monsieur was ambitious!

POIRIER. Much good it did me!

VERDELET. She's fainting!

POIRIER. Good God!

VERDELET. [*Kneeling before ANTOINETTE*] Toinon, my child, come to yourself!

POIRIER. Get out! You don't know what to say to her! [*Kneeling before ANTOINETTE*] Toinon, my child, come to yourself! X

ANTOINETTE. It was nothing — I'm well, father.

POIRIER. Don't worry, I'll get rid of the monster for you.

ANTOINETTE. What have I done to deserve this? And after three months of marriage! Why — the day after, the day after —! He wasn't faithful to me for a single day. He ran to her from my arms. Didn't he feel my heart beating? He didn't understand that I was giving myself and my love completely up to him. The wretch! I can't live — after this!

POIRIER. Can't live! You must! What would become of me without you? The scoundrel! Where are you going?

ANTOINETTE. To my room.

POIRIER. Do you want me to come with you?

ANTOINETTE. Thank you, father — no.

VERDELET. [*To POIRIER*] Leave her to cry alone. Tears will make her feel better. [*ANTOINETTE goes out*]

POIRIER. What a marriage! What a marriage! [*He strides back and forth, striking his breast as he walks*]

VERDELET. Calm yourself, Poirier, everything can be arranged again. At present our duty is to bring these two hearts together again.

POIRIER. I know my duty and I am going to do it. [*He picks up the letter*]

VERDELET. Please, now, don't do anything foolish!

Enter GASTON. 

POIRIER. Are you looking for something, Monsieur?

GASTON. Yes: a letter.

POIRIER. From Madame de Montjay. You needn't look for it, it is in my pocket.

GASTON. Have you by any chance opened it?

POIRIER. Yes, Monsieur, I have.

GASTON. You have? Do you realise, Monsieur, that that is an infamous trick? The act of a dishonest and dishonourable man?

VERDELET. Monsieur le marquis! — Poirier!

POIRIER. There is only one dishonourable man here, and that is you!

GASTON. Let us drop that! In stealing from me the secret of my fault, you have forfeited the right to judge it. There is but one thing more sacred than the lock of a safe, Monsieur, and that is the seal of a letter — because *it* cannot defend itself.

VERDELET. [*To POIRIER*] What did I tell you?

POIRIER. This is ridiculous! Do you mean to tell me that a father hasn't the right —? Why, I'm doing you a great favour even to answer you! You'll explain in court, Monsieur le marquis.

VERDELET. In court!

POIRIER. Do you think a man can bring despair and sin into our family and not be punished? I'll have a divorce, Monsieur!

GASTON. Will you drag all this into court? Where that letter will be read?

POIRIER. In public! Yes, Monsieur, in public.

VERDELET. You're crazy, Poirier. Think of the scandal!

GASTON. Of course, you're forgetting: a woman will lose her reputation!

POIRIER. Now, say something about her honour! Yes, I expected that!

GASTON. Yes, her honour, and if that isn't enough to dissuade you, her ruin —

POIRIER. So much the better! I'm delighted! She will get all she deserves, the —!

GASTON. Monsieur —!

POIRIER. She'll get no sympathy! To take a husband from his poor young wife, after three months of marriage!

GASTON. She is less to blame than I. I am the only one you should accuse —

POIRIER. You needn't worry: I despise you as the lowest of the low! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? To sacrifice a charming woman like Antoinette! Has she ever given you cause for complaint? Find a single fault, a single one, in order to excuse yourself! She has a heart of gold — and what eyes! And her education! You know what it cost, me, Verdelet!

VERDELET. Do keep calm, Poirier!

POIRIER. I am, am I not? If I only — No, there is justice — I'm going to see my lawyer at once.

GASTON. Please wait until tomorrow, Monsieur, I beg you. Just take time to think it over.

POIRIER. I have thought it over.

GASTON. [*To VERDELET*] Please help me to prevent him from committing an irreparable blunder, Monsieur.

VERDELET. Ah, you don't know him!

GASTON. [*To POIRIER*] Take care, Monsieur. It is my duty to save that woman, save her at any price. Let me tell you that I am responsible for everything.

POIRIER. I know that very well.

GASTON. You have no idea how desperate I can be.

POIRIER. So you're threatening?

GASTON. Yes, I am threatening. Give me that letter. You are not going to leave this room until I have it.

POIRIER. Violence, eh? Must I ring for the servants?

GASTON. That's so — I'm losing my head. At least, listen to me. You are not naturally mean; you are just

angry. And now your sorrow makes you so excited that you have no idea what you are doing.

POIRIER. I have a right to be angry, and my sorrow is decent and fitting.

GASTON. I have told you, Monsieur, I confess I am to blame; I am sorry. But if I promised you never to see Madame de Montjay again, if I swore that I would spend my life in trying to make your daughter happy——?

POIRIER. It would merely be the second time you have sworn! Let's stop this nonsense!

GASTON. Very well. You were right this morning: it is lack of an occupation that has been my ruin.

POIRIER. Ah, now, you admit it!

GASTON. Well, what if I took a position?

POIRIER. You——? A position?

GASTON. You have the right to doubt my word, that is true, but I ask you to keep that letter, and if I fail to keep my promise, you can always——

VERDELET. That's a good guarantee, Poirier.

POIRIER. A guarantee of what?

VERDELET. That he will stand by his promise: that he will never see that lady again, that he will take a position, and make your daughter happy. What more can you ask?

POIRIER. I see, but what assurance can I have?

VERDELET. The letter! What the devil, the letter!

POIRIER. That's so, yes, that's so. *pu m*

VERDELET. Well, do you accept? Anything is better than a divorce.

POIRIER. I don't quite agree with that, but if you insist——[*To the MARQUIS*] For my part, Monsieur, I am willing to accept your offer. Now we have only to consult my daughter.

VERDELET. She will surely not want any scandal.

POIRIER. Let's go and find her. [*To GASTON*] Believe me, Monsieur, my only object in all this is to insure my daughter's happiness. And the proof of my own sincerity is that I expect nothing from you, that I will receive no favour

?sacrificial to sincerity
#

from your hands, that I am firmly decided to remain the same plain business man I have always been.

VERDELET. Good, Poirier!

POIRIER. [*To VERDELET*] So long, at least, as he doesn't make my daughter so happy that — [*They go out*]

GASTON. Blame it on yourself, Marquis de Presles. What humiliations! Ah, Madame de Montjay! This is the hour of my fate. What are they going to do with me? Condemn me, or that unfortunate woman? Shame, or remorse? And it has all been because of one caprice — a single day! Blame it on yourself, Marquis de Presles — you have no one else to blame. [*He stands plunged in thought*]

Enter the DUKE, who comes up to GASTON and slaps him on the shoulder.

DUKE. What's the matter?

GASTON. You know what my father-in-law asked me this morning?

DUKE. Yes.

GASTON. What if I told you I were going to accede to his wishes?

DUKE. I should say, impossible!

GASTON. And yet it's a fact: I am.

DUKE. Are you crazy? You said yourself that if there was one man who had not the right —

GASTON. It must be. My father-in-law has opened a letter to me from Madame de Montjay. He was so angry that he declared he would take it to a lawyer. In order to stop that, I had to accept his conditions.

DUKE. Poor fellow! You are in a difficult situation!

GASTON. Pontgrimaud would be rendering me a great service if he were to kill me tomorrow.

DUKE. Come, come, put that idea out of your head.

GASTON. That would be a solution.

DUKE. You are only twenty-five — you still have a happy life before you.

J O

angry. STON. Life? Look at my situation: I am ruined, I am the slave of a father-in-law whose despotism makes capital of my faults, husband of a wife whom I have cruelly wounded, and who will never forget. You say that I may have a happy life before me, but I tell you I am disgusted with life and with myself! My cursed foolishness, my caprices, have brought me to a point where I have lost everything: liberty, domestic happiness, the esteem of the world, self-respect. How horrible!

DUKE. Courage, my friend. Don't lose hope!

GASTON. [*Rising*] Yes, I am a coward. A gentleman may lose everything except his honour.

DUKE. What are you going to do?

GASTON. What you would do in my place.

DUKE. I should not kill myself! No!

GASTON. You see, then, you have guessed — Shh! I have only my name now, and I want to keep that intact. Someone's coming!

Enter POIRIER, ANTOINETTE, and VERDELET.

ANTOINETTE. No, father, no. It's impossible. All is over between Monsieur de Presles and me!

VERDELET. I can't believe it's you speaking, my dear child.

POIRIER. But I tell you, he is going to take a position! He has promised never to see that woman again. He's going to make you happy!

ANTOINETTE. Happiness is no longer possible for me. If Monsieur de Presles has not been able to love me of his own accord, do you think he can ever love me when he is forced to?

POIRIER. [*To the MARQUIS*] Speak, Monsieur.

ANTOINETTE. Monsieur de Presles says nothing, because he knows I will not believe him. He is well aware, too, that every bond which held us together has been broken, and that he can never be anything but a stranger to me. Let us each

therefore take what liberty the law allows us. I want a separation, father. Give me that letter: it is mine and mine alone, to make what use of I please. Give it to me.

POIRIER. Please, my child, think of the scandal. It will affect us all.

ANTOINETTE. It will harm only those who are guilty.

VERDELET. Think of that woman whom you will ruin —

ANTOINETTE. Did she have pity on me? Father, give me the letter. It is not as your daughter that I ask for it, but as the outraged Marquise de Presles.

POIRIER. There. But I tell you, he is willing to take a position —

ANTOINETTE. Give it to me. [*To the MARQUIS*] Here is my revenge, Monsieur; I have you absolutely in my power. You placed your own honour at stake in order to save your mistress; I absolve you in this way. [*She tears up the letter and throws it into the fireplace*]

POIRIER. Well —! What's she done?

ANTOINETTE. My duty.

VERDELET. Dear child! [*He kisses her*]

DUKE. Noble heart!

GASTON. Ah, Madame, how can I hope to express to you —? ~~I was so haughty and proud — I thought I had made a misalliance, but I see that you bear my name better than I!~~ My whole life will not suffice to make up for the evil I have done you.

ANTOINETTE. I am a widow, Monsieur — [*She takes VERDELET'S arm and starts to leave, as the curtain falls*]

FOURTH ACT

[*The scene is the same. ANTOINETTE is seated between VERDELET and POIRIER*]

VERDELET. I tell you you still love him.

POIRIER. I tell you you hate him.

VERDELET. No, no, Poirier —

POIRIER. Yes, I say! Evidently what happened yesterday is not enough for you! I suppose you'd like to see that good-for-nothing carry her off now?

VERDELET. I don't want Antoinette's whole life ruined, but from the way you go about things I —

POIRIER. I go about things the way I want to, Verdelet. It's all very well and easy to play the part of mediator, but you're not at swords' points with the Marquis. Once let him carry her off and you'd be always with her, while I'd be sitting alone in my hole like an old screech-owl — that's what you'd like! I know you! You're selfish, like all old bachelors!

VERDELET. Take care, Poirier! Are you positive that while you're pushing things to extremes, you yourself are not acting selfishly —?

POIRIER. Ha, so I'm the selfish one, am I? Because I'm trying to safeguard my girl's happiness? Because I have no intention of allowing that blackguardly son-in-law of mine to take my child from me and make her life a torture! [To ANTOINETTE] Say something, can't you? It concerns you more than it does us!

ANTOINETTE. I don't love him any more, Tony. He crushed out of my heart everything that made me love him.

POIRIER. You see!

ANTOINETTE. I don't hate him, father; I am simply indifferent to him. I don't know him any more.

POIRIER. That's enough for me.

VERDELET. But, my poor Toinon, you are just beginning life. Have you ever thought what would become of you as a divorced woman? Did you ever consider —?

POIRIER. Verdelet, never mind your sermons! She won't have a very hard time of it with her good old father, who is going to spend all his time loving her and taking care of her. You'll see, dearie, what a lovely life we'll lead, we two — [indicating VERDELET] — we three! And I'm worth

more than you, you selfish brute! You'll see how we'll love you, and do everything in the world for you. We won't leave you alone here and run after countesses! Now, smile at your father, and say you're happy with him.

ANTOINETTE. Yes, father, very happy.

POIRIER. Hear that, Verdelet?

VERDELET. Yes, yes.

POIRIER. Now, as for your rascal of a husband — why, you've been much too good to him. We have him in our power at last. I'll allow him a thousand crowns a year, and he can go hang himself.

ANTOINETTE. Let him take everything I have.

POIRIER. Oh, no!

ANTOINETTE. I ask only one thing: never to see him again.

POIRIER. He'll hear from me before long. I've just delivered a last blow.

ANTOINETTE. What have you done?

POIRIER. Offered the Château de Presles for sale, the château of his worthy ancestors.

ANTOINETTE. Have you done that? And would you allow him, Tony?

VERDELET. [*Aside to ANTOINETTE*] Don't worry.

POIRIER. Yes, I have. The land speculators know their business, and I hope that in a month's time that vestige of feudalism will have disappeared and no longer soil the land of a free people. They'll plant beets over the site. From the old materials they will build huts for workingmen: useful farmers and vine-growers. The park of his fathers will be cut down and the wood sawed into little pieces, which will be burned in the fireplaces of good bourgeois, who have earned the money to buy firewood for themselves. And I myself will buy a cord or two for my own use.

ANTOINETTE. But he will think this is all revenge.

POIRIER. He will be perfectly right.

ANTOINETTE. He will think it is I who —

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VERDELET. [*Aside to ANTOINETTE*] Don't worry, my dear.

POIRIER. I'm going to see if the signs are ready. They're going to be huge, huge enough to cover the great walls all over Paris: "For sale, the Château de Presles"!

VERDELET. Perhaps it's already sold!

POIRIER. Since last evening? Nonsense! I'm going to the printer's. [*He goes out*]

VERDELET. Your father is absurd. If we let him have his way, he'd make any reconciliation impossible between you and your husband.

ANTOINETTE. But what can you possibly hope for, poor Tony? My love has fallen from too great a height to be able ever to rise again. You can have no idea how much Monsieur de Presles meant to me —

VERDELET. Oh, indeed I can.

(ANTOINETTE. He was not only a husband, but a master whose slave I was proud to be. I not only loved him, I admired him as a great representative of a former age. Oh, Tony, what a horrible awakening I've had!

Enter a SERVANT.

SERVANT. Monsieur le marquis asks whether Madame will see him?

ANTOINETTE. No.

VERDELET. See him, dear. [*To the SERVANT*] Monsieur le marquis may come in. [*The SERVANT goes out*]

ANTOINETTE. What good can come of it?

Enter GASTON.

GASTON. You need have no apprehension, Madame, I shall not trouble you long with my company. You said yesterday that you considered yourself a widow, and I am far too guilty not to feel that your decision is irrevocable. I have come to say good-bye to you.

VERDELET. What's this, Monsieur?

GASTON. Yes, I am going to do the only honourable thing that remains. You should be able to understand that.

VERDELET. But, Monsieur —?

GASTON. I understand. Fear nothing for the future, and reassure Monsieur Poirier. There is one position I can take, that of my father: in the army. I am leaving to-morrow for Africa with Monsieur de Montmeyran, who has been good enough to sacrifice his leave of absence for my sake.

VERDELET. [*Aside to ANTOINETTE*] What a splendid fellow!

ANTOINETTE. [*Aside to VERDELET*] I never said he was a coward!

VERDELET. Now, my dear children, don't do anything extreme. Monsieur le marquis, you are very much at fault, but I am sure that you ask nothing better than to make amends.

GASTON. If there were anything I could do —! [*A pause*] There is nothing — I know! [*To ANTOINETTE*] I leave you my name, Madame; I am sure you will keep it spotless. I carry away with me the remorse of having troubled your existence, but you are still young and beautiful, and war carries with it happy chances —

Enter the DUKE.

DUKE. I have come to get him.

GASTON. Come. [*Offering his hand to VERDELET*] Good-bye, Monsieur Verdelet. [*They embrace*] Good-bye, Madame — for always.

DUKE. For always! He loves you, Madame.

GASTON. Hush!

VERDELET. He loves you desperately. The moment he came from the black abyss from which you have helped him, his eyes were opened. He has seen you as you really are.

ANTOINETTE. Mademoiselle Poirier has triumphed over Madame de Montjay. How admirable!

VERDELET. You are cruel!

Y
GASTON. She is only doing justice, Monsieur. She was worthy of the purest love, and I married her for her money. I made a bargain, a bargain which I was not honest enough to abide by. [To ANTOINETTE] Yes, the very day after our marriage I sacrificed you, out of pure viciousness, for a woman who is far beneath you. Your youth, your charm, your purity, were not enough; no, in order to bring light to this darkened heart it was necessary for you to save my honour twice on the same day! How low I was to resist such devotion, and what does my love now prove? Can it possibly reinstate me in your eyes? When I loved you I did what any man in my place would have done; in blinding myself to your virtues and your splendid qualities I did what no one else would have done. You are right, Madame, to despise a man who is utterly unworthy of you. I have lost all, even the right to pity myself — I don't pity myself. — Come, Hector.

DUKE. Wait. Do you know where he is going, Madame? To fight a duel.

VERDELET and ANTOINETTE. To fight a duel?

GASTON. What are you saying?

DUKE. Well, if your wife doesn't love you any longer, there is no reason for hiding the truth. Yes, Madame, he is going to fight a duel.

ANTOINETTE. Oh, Tony, his life is in danger —!

DUKE. What difference does that make to you, Madame? Is it possible that everything is not over between you, then?

ANTOINETTE. Oh, no: everything is over. Monsieur de Presles may dispose of his life as he thinks best — he owes me nothing —

DUKE. [To GASTON] Come, then — [They go as far as the door]

ANTOINETTE. Gaston!

DUKE. You see, she still loves you!

GASTON. [Throwing himself at her feet] Oh, Madame, if that is true, if I still have a place in your affection, say some word — give me the wish to live.

Enter POIRIER.

POIRIER. What are you doing there, Monsieur le marquis?

ANTOINETTE. He is going to fight a duell!

POIRIER. A duel? And are you the least bit surprised? Mistresses, duels — that's to be expected. He who has land has war.

ANTOINETTE. What do you mean, father? Do you imagine ——?

POIRIER. I'd wager my head on it.

ANTOINETTE. That's not true, is it, Monsieur? You don't answer?

POIRIER. Do you think he would be honest enough to admit it?

GASTON. I cannot lie, Madame. This duel is the last remnant of an odious past.

POIRIER. He's a fool to confess it! The impudence!

ANTOINETTE. And I was led to understand that you still loved me! I was even ready to forgive you — while you were on the point of fighting a duel for your mistress! Why, this was a trap for my weakness. Ah, Monsieur le duc!

DUKE. He has already told you, Madame, that this duel was the remnant of a past which he detests and wants to lay at rest and obliterate.

VERDELET. [*To the MARQUIS*] Very well, Monsieur, then I have a simple plan: if you don't love Madame de Montjay any longer, then don't fight for her.

GASTON. What, Monsieur, make excuses?

VERDELET. You must give Antoinette a proof of your sincerity, and this is the only one which you can give. Then didn't you just now ask for something to do as an expiation? Time was the only proof she could impose. Aren't you happy that you now have a chance, and that you can give that proof at once? I know it's a great sacrifice, but if it were any less, could it be a real expiation?

POIRIER. [*Aside*] The fool! He's going to patch it up.

*gives up honour for
Antoinette*

GASTON. I would gladly sacrifice my life, but my honour
— the Marquise de Presles would never accept that sort of
sacrifice.

ANTOINETTE. What if you were mistaken, Monsieur?
 What if I would accept it?

GASTON. What, Madame, would you ask me ——?

ANTOINETTE. To do for me almost as much as you would
 for Madame de Montjay? Yes, Monsieur. For her sake you
 consented to forget the past of your family, and now would
 you refuse to forget a duel, a duel which is most offensive to
 me? How can I believe in your love, if it is less strong than
 your pride?

POIRIER. Then what good would a sword-scratch do you?
 Take my word for it, prudence is the mother of safety.

VERDELET. [*Aside*] Old fool!

GASTON. See? That is what people will say.

ANTOINETTE. Who would doubt your courage? Haven't
 you given ample proofs of it?

POIRIER. And then what do you care for the opinion of a
 lot of know-nothings? You will have the respect of my friends,
 and that ought to be enough ——

GASTON. You see, Madame, people would laugh at me, and
 you could not love a ridiculous man very long.

DUKE. No one would laugh at you. Let me take your
 excuses to the ground, and I promise there will be no levity.

GASTON. What! Do you too think that ——?

DUKE. Yes, my friend. Your affair is not one of those
 that can't possibly be arranged. The sacrifice your wife is
 asking affects only your own personal pride.

GASTON. But to make excuses on the ground ——?

POIRIER. I would!

VERDELET. Really, Poirier, one might think you were
 trying to make him fight!

POIRIER. I'm doing all in my power to prevent him.

DUKE. Come, Gaston, you have no right to refuse your
 wife this proof.

and up old man
love.

GASTON. Well — no! It's out of the question!

ANTOINETTE. That is the price of my forgiveness.

GASTON. Then I refuse it, Madame. I shan't carry my sorrow very long.

POIRIER. Nonsense. Don't listen to him, dearie. Wait till he has his sword in his hand: he'll defend himself, I tell you. It would be like an expert swimmer trying to drown himself: once in the water, the devil himself couldn't keep him from saving himself.

ANTOINETTE. If Madame de Montjay objected to your fighting you would give in to her. Good-bye.

GASTON. Antoinette, for God's sake —!

DUKE. She is exactly right.

GASTON. Excuses! I offer excuses!

ANTOINETTE. I see, you are thinking only of your own pride!

DUKE. Gaston! Give in! I swear I would do the same in your place.

GASTON. Very well — ~~but to Pontgrimaud!~~ Go without me, then.

DUKE. [*To ANTOINETTE*] Madame, are you now satisfied with him?

ANTOINETTE. Yes, Gaston, you have now made up for everything. I have nothing else to forgive you; I believe in you, I am happy, and I love you. [*The MARQUIS stands still, his head bowed. ANTOINETTE goes to him, takes his head in her hands, and kisses his forehead*] Now go and fight! Go! *Knew it*

GASTON. My dearest wife, you have my mother's heart!?

ANTOINETTE. No, my mother's, Monsieur —

POIRIER. [*Aside*] What idiots women are!

GASTON. [*To the DUKE*] Quick, or we shall be late!

ANTOINETTE. You are a good swordsman, are you not?

DUKE. He's as good as St. George, Madame, and he has a wrist of steel. Monsieur Poirier, pray for Pontgrimaud!

ANTOINETTE. [*To GASTON*] Please don't kill the young man.

GASTON. I'll let him off with a scratch — because you love me. Come, Hector.

Enter a SERVANT with a letter on a silver plate.

ANTOINETTE. Another letter?

GASTON. Open it yourself.

ANTOINETTE. It will be the first of yours that I have opened.

GASTON. I am sure of that.

ANTOINETTE. [*Opening the letter*] It is from Monsieur de Pontgrimaud.

GASTON. Bah!

ANTOINETTE. [*Reading*] "My dear Marquis——"

GASTON. Snob!

ANTOINETTE. "We have both proved our valour"——

GASTON. In different ways, however!

ANTOINETTE. "I therefore have no hesitation in telling you that I regret having for a moment lost my head"——

GASTON. I was the one who lost mine!

ANTOINETTE. "You are the only man in the world to whom I should think of making excuses."

GASTON. You flatter me, Monsieur.

ANTOINETTE. "And I have no doubt that you will accept them as gallantly as they are offered."

GASTON. Exactly!

ANTOINETTE. "With all my heart, Viscount de Pontgrimaud."

DUKE. He is not a viscount, he has no heart.¹ Otherwise// his letter is most appropriate.

VERDELET. [*To GASTON*] Everything has turned out splendidly, my dear boy. I hope you have learned your lesson?

GASTON. For the rest of my life, dear Monsieur Verdelet. From this day on I begin a serious and calm existence. In

¹ Here follows a pun on "Pont" — "bridge," — and "grimaud" — "scrib-
bler." — Tr.

order to break definitely with the follies of my past, I ask you for a place in your office.

VERDELET. In my office! You! A gentleman!

GASTON. Have I not my wife to support?

DUKE. You will do as the Breton nobles did, when they laid down their swords in Parliament to enter the field of commerce, and took them up again after having set their houses in order.

VERDELET. Very good, Monsieur le marquis.

POIRIER. [*Aside*] It's now my turn to give in. [*Aloud*] My dear son-in-law, that is a most liberal sentiment; you really deserve to be a bourgeois. Now that we can understand each other, let us make peace. Stay with me.

GASTON. I ask for nothing better than to make my peace with you, Monsieur. But as to staying with you, that is another matter. You have made me understand the happiness which the wood-chopper feels when he is master of his own home. I do not blame you, but I cannot help remembering.

POIRIER. Are you going to take away my daughter? Are you going to leave me alone?

ANTOINETTE. I'll come to see you often, father.

GASTON. And you will always be welcome.

POIRIER. So my daughter is going to be the wife of a tradesman!

VERDELET. No, Poirier, your daughter will be mistress of the Château de Presles. The château was sold this morning, and, with the permission of your husband, Toinon, it will be my wedding present.

ANTOINETTE. Dear Tony! May I accept it, Gaston?

GASTON. Monsieur Verdelet is one of those to whom it is a pleasure to be grateful.

VERDELET. I am retiring from business, and, if you will allow me, I shall come and live with you, Monsieur le marquis. We shall cultivate your land together. That is a gentleman's profession.

POIRIER. Well, what about me, then? Aren't you going

to invite me? All children are ungrateful — yes, my poor father was right.

VERDELET. Buy some land, and live near us.

POIRIER. That's an idea!

VERDELET. That's all you have to do, and besides — you're cured of your ambition, aren't you? *He* think you are.

POIRIER. Yes, yes. [*Aside*] Let me see: this is 1846. I'll be deputy of the *arrondissement* of Presles in forty-seven, and peer of France in forty-eight!

CURTAIN

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

[LES FOURCHAMBAULT]

A COMEDY IN FIVE ACTS

First produced at the Comédie Française, Paris, in 1878.

EDMOND GOT,

Dean of the Comédie-Française,

MY OLD FRIEND, —We have arm in arm made our careers together, aiding each other on the way. At this moment, as we are nearing the end, as we are almost touching the goal, I think it well for us to show our friendship *coram populo*, and by way of doing so, I beg you to accept this dedication which I offer you

with all my heart,

ÉMILE AUGIER

PERSONS REPRESENTED

[ORIGINAL PRODUCTION]

FOURCHAMBAULT (60 years)	<i>MM. Barré</i>
LÉOPOLD, HIS SON (24 years)	<i>Coquelin</i>
BERNARD (38 years)	<i>Got</i>
BARON RASTIBOULOIS, PREFECT OF SEINE-ET-MAUCHE (55 years)	<i>Thiron</i>
MADAME FOURCHAMBAULT (47 years)	<i>MMES. Provost-Ponsin</i>
MADAME BERNARD (60 years)	<i>Agar</i>
BLANCHE (18 years)	<i>Reichenberg</i>
MARIE LETELLIER (22 years)	<i>Crotzelle</i>

SCENE: — *The First Act is laid in Ingouville; the others in Le Havre.*

THE HOUSE OF FOURCHAMBAULT

ACT I

SCENE: — *At the Villa Fourchambault, Ingouville. — A drawing-room on the ground-floor, opening upon a terrace from which can be seen Le Havre and the sea. — A large entrance at the back, which remains open; doors on either side.*

FOURCHAMBAULT is seated to the right, near a table, reading his paper; on the other side of the table is MADAME FOURCHAMBAULT, doing crochet work; up-stage to the right, a small table, where BLANCHE is serving coffee; to the left, MARIE, seated doing fancy-work near a work-table upon which are heaped a number of skeins of coloured worsted; LÉOPOLD, standing behind her, is smoking a cigarette.

THE BUTLER. [*At the large door at the back*] The coachman wishes to know whether there are any orders?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. No, I am not going out to-day.

FOURCHAMBAULT. But I am going out. — I'm going to Le Havre.

LÉOPOLD. To the office? On Sunday?

FOURCHAMBAULT. There is no Sunday for a banker. You needn't worry: I shall leave you at Ingouville. [*To THE BUTLER*] The victoria in an hour!

THE BUTLER. Anything further?

LÉOPOLD. Wait a moment. [*To MARIE and BLANCHE*] Shall we go horseback-riding, ladies?

BLANCHE. I'm tired.

LÉOPOLD. How about you, Maïa?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Without your sister? Are you out of your mind?

BLANCHE. That would be nothing very extraordinary.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. It wouldn't be respectable. That will do, Germain.

THE BUTLER *goes out.*

MARIE. In France, then, a young lady who goes horseback riding alone with a young man —? — is that "shocking"?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Very shocking, my dear! Do they do that at Bourbon?

MARIE. Oh, we aren't so careful about small matters, and I assure you the devil gains nothing.

LÉOPOLD. [*Aside*] He doesn't lose much, either!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You must accustom yourself to our European prudery.

MARIE. I shall find it very difficult. You know I was brought up according to the principles of Créole liberty, added to those of the English, — my mother came from the Island of Mauritius.

FOURCHAMBAULT. But, my dear child, if you are applying for a position as teacher your manners must be a little more — correct.

MARIE. I'll have them when they become necessary — after I get the position.

BLANCHE. Why talk about that, Papa? It's not at all pleasant.

MARIE. Oh, my dear Blanchette, if I took everything to heart, I'd live a dog's life. Heaven has denied me much, but I'm at least happy, and I can look into the future without a shadow of doubt or misapprehension.

LÉOPOLD. What troubles me is what you are going to teach your pupils. You don't appear to be a well of knowledge.

MARIE. There's where you are mistaken: I am. You might even come to school to me.

LÉOPOLD. Oh, — oh, you're a regular Pico della Girandola, then?

MARIE. Mirandola, my poor fellow! One point for me.

LÉOPOLD. I just wanted to catch you.

BLANCHE. Yes, the way you said the other day that Henry IV was the son of Henry III!

LÉOPOLD. That was my opinion on the subject.

MARIE. Was it sincere?

LÉOPOLD. And disinterested — I swear.

MARIE. Then I respect it.

LÉOPOLD. [*Sighing*] Without sharing it!

LÉOPOLD *places a letter on the sewing-table, among the worsted skeins; MARIE turns round at the same moment, and catches sight of it.*

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Who has also seen the letter; aside*] A letter? How imprudent!

MARIE. [*Sitting by the sewing-table and taking up the letter, which she folds twice. — To LÉOPOLD*] Help me untangle this skein.

LÉOPOLD. Certainly. [*He kneels on one knee before her; she takes the skein in her hands, and begins to wind the worsted round the letter. — In an undertone*] My letter! That's not nice of you!

MARIE. [*As before*] Would you prefer my giving it to your mother?

BLANCHE. [*Looking at them*] The Countess and Chérubin, you might almost think!¹

FOURCHAMBAULT. What's this, Mademoiselle, have you seen *Le Mariage de Figaro*? [*To his wife*] Do you allow her to read such things?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, I am very careful: she saw the play only as an opera.

FOURCHAMBAULT. That is different — if it was at the *Opéra*, she understood nothing.

BLANCHE. [*Aside*] No, I'm so stupid.

MARIE. [*Still winding the worsted*] Any news?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Three of friend Bernard's ships came in yesterday — if that's of any interest to you?

¹ Characters in Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro*.

LÉOPOLD. 'Everything that concerns M. Bernard is of especial interest to Mlle. Letellier.

MARIE. Don't move!

FOURCHAMBAULT. There's a man who made a fortune in quick time!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Wasn't he only captain of a trader when the Civil War broke out in the United States?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes. He foresaw how the war would last; he put everything he had into cotton, and then waited. To-day he's a millionaire, one of the principal ship-owners in Le Havre.

LÉOPOLD. And his money has left him quite unchanged — unluckily for him! He is certainly an ungainly, thick-set, ill-looking fellow!

BLANCHE. Oh, I know he's your pet aversion, so —

MARIE. What did he ever do to you?

LÉOPOLD. Nothing — he's a fearful-looking beast, that's all!

MARIE. I don't consider him so; at times I think he's beautiful.

LÉOPOLD. Oh! — When?

MARIE. Well — in time of danger, for instance.

LÉOPOLD. What do you know about that?

MARIE. On ship-board when we were crossing, I once saw him stop an attempted mutiny; and I tell you that little "thick-set" fellow rose to six feet when he took the leader of the mutineers by the throat and ordered his accomplices to put him in irons.

LÉOPOLD. And did they obey?

MARIE. Men don't disobey a man whose eyes flashed lightning the way his did. I should have been proud at that moment to be his daughter or his sister.

LÉOPOLD. Why not his mother, while you're wishing?

MARIE. [*Smiling*] The place is taken, and very well, let me tell you.

BLANCHE. What does she look like?

MARIE. She's tall and pale, and has white hair.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Why doesn't he introduce her anywhere?

LÉOPOLD. Doubtless because she is not a presentable person. Maia's friend is a barnyard peacock, who left Dieppe, where he was born, because there were too many witnesses of his low birth. He hides his mother here as well as he is able, because she is also another indication of his humble origin.

MARIE. Mme. Bernard is a very distinguished and worthy woman, Léo. — Now, the ball is all rolled. [*She rises and puts the ball in the workbasket*]

LÉOPOLD. [*Also rising; aside*] You have only to unroll it, now. [*The clock strikes one.*]

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Rising*] One o'clock already! I expect a visit, and my hair isn't dressed yet. Come, Blanche, I have something to say to you.

FOURCHAMBAULT. What's this visit?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That is my affair. [*Aside to BLANCHE*] Someone for you. Walk ahead, I'll tell you about it. [*BLANCHE goes out; MME. FOURCHAMBAULT goes behind the sewing-table, and turns over the skeins*] The letter's not here — and I was sure —! [*She goes out*]

LÉOPOLD. [*To MARIE, at the principal entrance*] Shall we walk in the park?

MARIE. I'm the only one left, then, whom no one "has to talk with"; I'll go and pick a bouquet for my birthday.

LÉOPOLD. Is to-day your birthday?

MARIE. Yes — every time I give myself a bouquet. [*She goes out*]

FOURCHAMBAULT. Sit down there.

LÉOPOLD. [*Sitting near the sewing-table*] You want me to sit down? Are you going to lecture me?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes. I'm not satisfied with you, my boy.

LÉOPOLD. Father, I swear it's not I!

FOURCHAMBAULT. What?

LÉOPOLD. I don't know; but since my conscience is clear, I protest in advance.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Try to be serious for once in your life. Your behaviour pains and grieves me, my dear Léopold. You don't gamble any longer, you rarely go to the Club, you gave up the little dancing-girl — don't deny it! I have my information on good authority, from the fathers of your friends — *they* get it from their sons.

LÉOPOLD. For Heaven's sake, Father! Mother and you have given me so many sermons on gambling and dancing-girls that I thought you'd be glad to see me reform. If I'm mistaken, there's no harm done so far, and I —

FOURCHAMBAULT. Your friends do not attribute your reforms to our sermons, but to the arrival at our home of Mlle. Letellier. As a matter of fact, I have noticed that during the past two months you have been quite unnaturally assiduous within the family circle.

LÉOPOLD. If you mean to insinuate that the presence of Maïa serves as an added attraction to the house —

FOURCHAMBAULT. To begin with, you might call her Mlle. Mariel

LÉOPOLD. What sort of quarrel are you trying to lead me into? I call her Maïa just as she calls me Léo. What's the harm in calling her by her Créole name? Do you object too to my speaking to her in her own native broken French?

FOURCHAMBAULT. No, I don't! But in your underhand way you tell her in that gibberish a heap of things you wouldn't dare say in French.

LÉOPOLD. She's no worse than I am in that respect.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You are worse than she; I know your cynicism about women. This one comes from a foreign country, she's poor, and a bit free in her manners, she appears to you as a *déclassée* — you hope to — obtain favours from her. I tell you I'd be heart-broken if anything happened to her; she's our guest, and I am responsible for her; I have great affection for her, and I respect her highly — I beg of you not to make love to her.

LÉOPOLD. What makes you think I am?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Good Heavens, can't I see? I've noticed it ever since I was told. Your motives cannot be good. Now you must be made aware of her situation; I have therefore looked into the matter and found your uncle's letter. There, read it. [*He gives LÉOPOLD a letter*]

LÉOPOLD. [*Reading*] "Ile Bourbon, April 15, 1877. My Dear Brother-in-law. This letter will be presented by Mademoiselle Marie Letellier, in whom the entire colony has the most respectful interest."

FOURCHAMBAULT. "Most respectful," you see.

LÉOPOLD. There are eight pages to this letter.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Continue, and stop your talking.

LÉOPOLD. I don't talk so much as my uncle. [*Reading*] "The most respectful interest." — You are perfectly well aware you told us everything that this contains.

FOURCHAMBAULT. It appears that you have forgotten it.

LÉOPOLD. I? What will you wager that I can't recite the whole thing in twenty words, signature included? Marie Letellier, twenty-two years, born at Bourbon, French father, English mother. Ruin, and death of both parents. — Orphan taken under the protection of an old friend of the family. — At end of the year, death of old friend who leaves to her companion a little farm in Calvados. — Heir leaves for France in order to sell farm —

FOURCHAMBAULT. And I believe I have found a purchaser who will pay 40,000 francs for it.

LÉOPOLD. Don't interrupt the report: those four words don't count. With intention of selling little farm and obtaining position as teacher — as in comedies. — While waiting, lodged in the domicile of Fourchambault the Elder who, believing her very virtuous, fears that Fourchambault Junior might lead her astray —

FOURCHAMBAULT. But, God bless me, she can be quite virtuous and yet fall in love with you! And you, I presume, leading her on with promises of marriage —

LÉOPOLD. An outrageous supposition for Fourchambault Junior — Léopold's not villainous!

FOURCHAMBAULT. It's not always out of villainy that such promises are made! You begin by flirting with a pretty girl just to pass the time; soon, a mere caprice turns into love, love into passion, and you end by proposing marriage, and all in perfectly good faith!

LÉOPOLD. What a lot you know about it! Have you gone through the same experience yourself?

FOURCHAMBAULT. I? Never! But I once had a friend who began with his sister's piano-teacher — like you and Maïa — and one fine day she found she was — er —

LÉOPOLD. Your friend had no scruples, did he? And he married her?

FOURCHAMBAULT. He wanted to, and if the woman had been as irreproachable as Maïa, there would have been no obstacle to prevent his doing so. But, luckily for him, his father opened his eyes for him at the time — but what a fearful scandal there was! The poor boy couldn't marry for the next ten years! Let that be a lesson for you.

LÉOPOLD. Well, if that could influence me to marry, as it did your friend, the only daughter of a rich manufacturer of lamp-shades —

FOURCHAMBAULT. What's that? Lampshades? —

LÉOPOLD. Grandfather Reboulin's lamp-shades, eh?

FOURCHAMBAULT. But who told you — ?

LÉOPOLD. That your friend married mother? It is not hard to see you don't go often to the theatre! General rule: when one character makes an object-lesson for another with the story of a friend who shall be nameless, you may be sure it is no other than his own.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Absurd! If you study life from comedies, I can't wonder at your despising women. What my friend's name was, is of no importance — if you want to know, it was Durand.

LÉOPOLD. In leisure moments. — How old was he?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Twenty-two.

A SERVANT. [*At the door*] The victoria is ready.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Very well, I'm coming. [*To LÉOPOLD*]
I shall return in two hours. [*He goes out.*]

LÉOPOLD. [*Alone*] After that story about the music teacher, to believe in the virtue of female companions who intend to teach; oh, no, it's really too thin! Especially when they've been aboard ship with quellers of rebellions. Dear Papa is no more to be feared than a new-born babe! I can imagine him respecting women who asked nothing better than to be offended! — Never fear, charming Maïa, I'll have nothing to do with his aged inexperience, and if I please you half as much as you please me, we'll not have to trouble the mayor¹ or his assistants!

MARIE. [*Enters, laughing. She carries a basket filled with flowers. To BLANCHE, who enters at the same time*] What a lovely suitor for you!

BLANCHE. And he has red hair — but it's begun to fall out.

LÉOPOLD. [*Going toward them*] Who the devil are you talking about?

BLANCHE. Were you there?

MARIE. We were speaking of the young Baron Anatole Rastiboulois.

LÉOPOLD. What were you saying?

BLANCHE. Mamma expects a visit from his father, M. le préfet de Seine-et-Manche.

LÉOPOLD. And what can that potentate want with her?

BLANCHE. Ah, now, ask Maïa, I'm too excited.

LÉOPOLD. [*To MARIE*] Tell me, Maïa.

MARIE. He is coming to ask for the hand of Blanche, for his son.

LÉOPOLD. He will be cordially welcomed!

BLANCHE. Of course! Mamma will be delighted!

LÉOPOLD. But from what I have just heard, you —

¹ Who officiates at marriage ceremonies in France.

BLANCHE. I too. I consider M. Anatole quite adequate for a husband.

MARIE. What, would you marry him?

BLANCHE. Why not?

LÉOPOLD. She puzzles me, that girl.

BLANCHE. Isn't one husband much like another? Like the wines in a restaurant, the only difference is in the label.

LÉOPOLD. I had an idea you had yourself decided on some one —

BLANCHE. Nonsense!

LÉOPOLD. I rather thought that Victor Chauvet —

BLANCHE. Are you interested in him?

LÉOPOLD. Not the least bit.

BLANCHE. Neither am I. He is in Calcutta — he may remain there, so far as I am concerned. To-day is Saint Lambert's day —

LÉOPOLD. Well, if he had no more claim on your affection than that —

BLANCHE. That's nonsense — out of a boarding-school girl's novel —

LÉOPOLD. It's *good* sense, little sister.

MARIE. Too good.

LÉOPOLD. Think so?

THE SERVANT. [*Announcing*] M. Bernard.

LÉOPOLD. My pet aversion — I'm off! [*He goes out, left*]

BERNARD. [*Entering at the back*] How are you, ladies?

MARIE. How d'ye do?

BLANCHE. How are you, M. Bernard?

MARIE *arranges her flowers in a vase, on the table to the right.*

BERNARD. Is Mme. Fourchambault to be seen? I have come to report on an errand she asked me to do for her.

BLANCHE. Oh yes, the yacht — Have you been over it?

BERNARD. The ship's in good condition. It cost originally 40,000 francs. Sir John Sunter is willing to sell it for 20,000 —

it's a good bargain; I have only to obtain Mme. Fourchambault's authorisation to close the bargain.

BLANCHE. What great fun it will be to promenade on it! Mamma is dressing: I doubt whether she can see you at once, but I'll tell her you are here. [*She goes out, left*]

MARIE. [*Seated near the table to the right, taking BERNARD'S hands in her own*] How are you, dear friend? Why did I call you "dear friend"? I have known you for only three months; but you were so good to me while we were crossing, so like a father — no, not so old as that! — like a brother —

BERNARD. Not so old!

MARIE. Neither father nor brother? What, then?

BERNARD. You have already said it: friend, old friend.

MARIE. That is not enough. Do you want me to call you uncle?

BERNARD. I should be very glad.

MARIE. Good. Well, Uncle, sit down there. [*He sits at the opposite side of the table*] How is your mother? I haven't seen her for two weeks.

BERNARD. She complains of the fact.

MARIE. It's not my fault. Since we've moved to Ingouville, I've not set foot in Le Havre.

BERNARD. You are enjoying yourself with the Fourchambaults.

MARIE. Very much: they are very kind, and they are spoiling me as fast as they know how. I'm in love with the girl.

BERNARD. There is also a young man.

MARIE. Léopold? Very nice sort of fellow — charming.

BERNARD. Charming! He makes love to you, doesn't he?

MARIE. If he didn't, he wouldn't be doing his duty as host. Does it ever happen in France that a young girl is not made love to? [*She rises and goes to the work-basket, getting a ball of worsted from which she takes a strand to tie her bouquet*]

BERNARD. Married women are preferred.

MARIE. It's more moral. What a funny country! Well, I'm only the more obliged to Léopold for wasting his time on me.

BERNARD. Take care! It is said that his time is not wasted.

MARIE. [*Turning round quickly*] Who says that?

BERNARD. That's the story that's going about town.

MARIE. [*Crossing*] Let the town mind its own affairs!

BERNARD. It's always meddling in what doesn't concern it.

MARIE. You can tell the gossips to mind their own business, as I mind my own. It's my pleasure to have Léopold make love to me, and I cannot permit anyone to see anything wrong in his doing so.

BERNARD. Little heed they'll take of what you permit.

MARIE. Then what will be the harm?

BERNARD. I ought to warn you that he will not marry you.

MARIE. Come, come, Uncle, you have a high opinion of me! Do you think I'm looking for a husband?

BERNARD. If you are not looking for a husband, for Heaven's sake, what are you looking for?

MARIE. I want to — [*Laughing*] merely to enjoy a little warfare between the two of us. Leave me to my own devices, and don't be a kill-joy.

BERNARD. Take my advice, my child, don't play with fire: you always get scorched.

MARIE. Haven't you confidence in me?

BERNARD. I have confidence in your virtue, but I doubt your prudence; it seems to me you are rather too free in your ways here.

MARIE. What more natural? It's my last breath of freedom. Just think, I leave here only to go into a sort of slavery.

BERNARD. What you call slavery, my child, is the most serious and dignified of life's positions.

MARIE. You are right.

BERNARD. You are in a false position here.

MARIE. Find me another place.

BERNARD. Will you let me?

MARIE. [*Giving him her hand*] Please!

Enter BLANCHE.

BLANCHE. Mamma asks you to excuse her; she is not ready to see you yet. She must consult with Papa before closing the bargain.

BERNARD. Hasn't he been consulted yet?

BLANCHE. He will be in an hour's time; Mamma will write you.

BERNARD. I shall wait; there is no harm in that. Good-bye, ladies! [*To MARIE*] You will hear from me in a few days. [*He goes out*]

BLANCHE. What does he mean by "hearing from him"?

MARIE. He was good enough to offer to find me a position.

BLANCHE. Do you want to leave us?

MARIE. I don't want to, my dear Blanchette, but I can't stay here until the end of time; I have already imposed on your kindness.

BLANCHE. We are the ones who are imposing on you, and most selfishly. If we weren't so proud, we should acknowledge that we were in *your* debt.

MARIE. How do you make that out?

BLANCHE. You are so thrillingly alive! You breathe vitality into everyone you associate with. You have taught me more in two months than my teachers have in ten years: I have learned to take an interest in things. I was merely a doll before I knew you; I feel that in your presence I am becoming a young woman, too — I love you like a sister.¹

MARIE. [*Kissing her*] I too love you, like a sister.

BLANCHE. How sweet that word is — in French as well as in English! I have always wanted to have a sister — like you! — What a beautiful sister I should have, and what a daughter you would be for Mamma!

MARIE. I have an idea that this beauty would hardly be to her taste!

¹ The last six words are, in the text, English.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Speaking to someone off-stage*]
It's an outrage!

BLANCHE. I hear her.

MARIE. A storm!

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Outside*] But, my dear —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Very well, let's not say another word — I

BLANCHE. Let's run for our lives!

MARIE. Let us not bother them! [*They go out, back*]

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Entering left*] Why are you following me?

FOURCHAMBAULT. I'm not, I'm merely accompanying you.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I can't bear to have you near me; leave me! — When my poor mother gave me to you together with 800,000 francs, she never dreamed she was condemning me to a life of privation!

FOURCHAMBAULT. A life of privation? Because I refuse you a yacht?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I thought that my dowry might allow me a few simple luxuries — I see I'm mistaken.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Simple luxury? Twenty thousand francs!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Do *you* have to pay for it?

FOURCHAMBAULT. That sort of reasoning would bankrupt me!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Now I'm ruining the dear man! His whole fortune comes from me.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Don't excite yourself, my dear; I speak quietly, but you must understand the situation.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. What situation?

FOURCHAMBAULT. I ought to be rich — but thanks to the way you manage things, and run up expenses "out of your dowry," as you say, I manage to live only from day to day. If a financial crisis occurred to-morrow in Le Havre, I shouldn't have one sou to rub against another.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That's not true! If it is, your fate is sealed.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Mine, or yours?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Mine, the ideal. Is it my fault if you don't understand business? If you never knew how to profit by our position and acquaintances? Anyone else, in your place —

FOURCHAMBAULT. Very possibly, but I have been foolish enough to wish to remain an honest man.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes, every fool who hasn't been able to make a success has said the same thing. And I tell you, Monsieur, when a man is afraid to make a career for himself, he ought never to be the head of a bank. He ought to resign in favour of his son.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You keep harping on that! Haven't I already told you that you might just as well bury me alive! I am already a nonentity in my family.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You choose your time for appearing in the light of a victim, now that you have just refused me a little favour.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I refuse nothing; I am merely laying the matter before you. Now do what you like, I can say no more.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Good! But, really, you've been very hard on me, Adrien, and at the very moment I was preparing to surprise you —

FOURCHAMBAULT. Surprise? Well, what is it? [*Aside*] I'm afraid —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. The House of Fourchambault has just gained a signal victory over the House of Duhamel.

FOURCHAMBAULT. To wit —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Madame Duhamel has for many years been trying to marry her daughter to the Prefect's son —

FOURCHAMBAULT. I know that. Well?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. While the good lady was publishing her intentions abroad I was quietly working away, and now

Baron Rastiboulois is coming here to ask you for your daughter's hand.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, no! I have someone else in view.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You have? I should be most happy to know — ?

FOURCHAMBAULT. A splendid lad — one of our sort — who loves Blanche, and is loved by her — or I am very much mistaken.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Well, you are very much mistaken — absolutely. Do you refer to M. Victor Chauvet? M. Bernard's clerk?

FOURCHAMBAULT. His right hand, his *alter ego*.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Blanche merely thought she had a fancy for him — it was a morning mist, which I had only to blow upon to drive away. She thinks nothing more of the matter, and I advise you to do likewise.

FOURCHAMBAULT. What have you against the young man?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Nothing whatsoever! Only his name is so ridiculous — Chauvet¹ — !

FOURCHAMBAULT. He's as curly-haired as a sheep!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. As you like, only I should never have consented to be called Madame Chauvet, and my daughter takes after her mother. But that's a detail; the long and short of the matter is that I refuse to allow my daughter to marry a clerk.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You refuse? You refuse! There are two of us to take into account.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Are you giving Blanche a dowry?

FOURCHAMBAULT. I? — No.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Then you see very clearly that there are not two of us to take into account. As I am giving her her dowry, I have the right to choose my son-in-law.

FOURCHAMBAULT. And I have the right to refuse; I tell you I won't have your little Baron at any price.

¹ An untranslatable pun on the word "chauve"; bald.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. What have *you* against him, besides his title?

FOURCHAMBAULT. He's a man-about-town, a gambler, a roué, old for his years.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. He pleases Blanche just as he is.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Lord! He's no beauty.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. What does that matter? Haven't I been the happiest of wives?

FOURCHAMBAULT. What's that? For the last time, I refuse. Blanche may not marry Chauvet — that's possible! — but she shan't marry Rastiboulois, that's certain!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. But, Monsieur —

FOURCHAMBAULT. I have spoken — [*He goes out*]

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Alone*] Our lords and masters! These are the creatures who make the laws! We unfortunate women! We wear out our lives trying to better our families, and then a hare-brained despot spoils everything for a whim!

A SERVANT. [*Announcing*] M. le baron Rastiboulois.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Aside*] What can I say to him?

RASTIBOULOIS. [*As he enters*] Pardon me, dear lady, for taking the liberty of coming without preparing you. I have so little spare time —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Motioning him to a chair*] You need make no apologies, Baron.

RASTIBOULOIS. [*Sitting*] No "Baron" here, please: merely a father, and it is as such that I have presumed to ask for this interview, of which my age would otherwise render me unworthy, I regret —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Aside*] How friendly he is!

RASTIBOULOIS. You are acquainted with the object of my visit, as my wife and you are at one in all particulars. It is therefore a pure formality that I am fulfilling —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. First of all, M. le baron, I ought to let you know that I have not yet taken my husband into my confidence.

RASTIBOULOIS. Good Lord! Could I have possibly been too precipitous in breaking with the Duhamels?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Aside*] Oh!

RASTIBOULOIS. Of course, you understand —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Aside*] Understand! [*Resolutely*] I really must have my husband's consent.

RASTIBOULOIS. Good. Well, Madame, prepare your lord and master for the proposal which I shall have the honour to make him to-morrow; and, in order to settle the affair between you and me, though I dislike mentioning money-matters with a pretty woman —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, Baron!

RASTIBOULOIS. With a pretty woman — I repeat it. Although people of our station in life are above these sordid details, I must, as a matter of course, ask you a few questions. I am giving my son 150,000 francs on his wedding-day, and he will inherit an equal amount from his mother and me. — There!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. And I for my part —

RASTIBOULOIS. Not another word, if you please! If your daughter brought nothing but herself, we should sign the contract with our eyes closed.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You are a true gentleman.

RASTIBOULOIS. So it is said. One word: This 300,000 francs' dowry is from your private fortune?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. My husband does not want to put his tools, his working capital, into property.

RASTIBOULOIS. His tools? His weapons, his armament, for a large commercial enterprise, like your husband's, is a form of nobility in itself, and the House of Fourchambault may well form an alliance on a basis of perfect equality with the House of Rastiboulois. Its money is as good as ours, and a fortune the size of your husband's which amounts to — how much?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I haven't the slightest notion.

RASTIBOULOIS. Believe me, I have no curiosity in the matter. It was merely — er — to round out the sentence which

led me to appear to ask the question. I have a mortal terror of what are basely called — expectations. I have only one, Madame: merely that *you* outlive *us*.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That rests with Heaven! Yet, my health is anything but good, in spite of appearances which are —

RASTIBOULOIS. Admirable, Madame, admirable. Will your son inherit the bank?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. His sister of course will not be forgotten —

RASTIBOULOIS. Not another word! I am rather maladroit with my questions; they sound as if I were making an inventory, and God knows I —! I mean, your son is a fine fellow whom any girl would be lucky to catch. Have you any intention of seeing him settled in life?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Not yet, the dear boy!

RASTIBOULOIS. He has still a few wild oats to sow.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. He's "finding himself."

RASTIBOULOIS. [*Smiling*] Yes, so they say — very much.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Aside*] Can they suspect —?

RASTIBOULOIS. I have the greatest admiration for him! I speak, you see, as a member of the family, and yet I have not heard from its head.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You will this evening; he himself will come to you, with his consent. Don't trouble yourself, your time is precious.

RASTIBOULOIS. [*Looking at his watch*] So precious that I must put an end to this charming conversation. Present my compliments to M. Fourchambault, and accept for yourself my kindest regards. [*He kisses her hand*]

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Until this evening, my dear Baron. [*He goes out*]

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Alone*] What charming manners! — He might be dangerous if he were ten years younger —

Enter FOURCHAMBAULT.

FOURCHAMBAULT. He's gone. How did things go?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Very nicely. I told him that for my part I was most honoured by his offer, but that I must refer the matter to the head of the family, and that you would give him your answer in person. You have only to go to the Prefecture to-night.

FOURCHAMBAULT. What? Must I go to-night —? You should have told him flatly and at once! It's very embarrassing to say a thing like that to his face.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That is why I didn't tell him.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I'm going to make a mortal enemy of that man.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Mortal — we are all mortal.

FOURCHAMBAULT. This is a nice time for joking!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. After all, no one is forcing you.

FOURCHAMBAULT. But can't you see that in my position, everything depends on my relations with everybody! My God, couldn't you have managed the refusal yourself?¹ — so that the Baron will go at once to the Duhamels and give to the rival house the honour of an alliance with his own.

FOURCHAMBAULT. That is not pleasant.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Accommodate yourself to circumstances. You still have time to change your mind.

FOURCHAMBAULT. That is not the question. A little fool of a gambler!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Like Léopold!

FOURCHAMBAULT. You don't think I'd give my daughter to Léopold!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Very well; accept or refuse — it's your affair.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You've put me in a lovely situation!

¹Original: "*Fourchambault*. Ne pouvais-tu pas prendre la rupture sous ton bonnet?

Madame Fourchambault. Les bonnets ne sont pas encore de mon âge. Je me coiffe en cheveux."

The pun is untranslatable.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You have until to-night to decide; I leave you absolutely free to choose. Only you would be doing me a great favour, as you're going to the Prefecture, to see M. Bernard.

FOURCHAMBAULT. What for?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. To tell him not to trouble about the yacht.

FOURCHAMBAULT. What? You don't want ——?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes, I've thought it over.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, you can be charming when you want to be!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I am merely reasonable.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I see that, I see that!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I am more reasonable than you, because I give up something absurd, while you were foolish enough to offer to let me have it.

FOURCHAMBAULT. That's true! More reasonable than I! — Advise me now about this cursed affair.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I advise you to consult Blanche.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Why, I never thought of that! Perfect! She's the one who's principally interested, after all: I'll see what she has to say. — Will you accept her decision?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Of course, since I accepted yours

FOURCHAMBAULT. You're an angel. — Let's find Blanche. [MME. FOURCHAMBAULT offers him her arm; both go toward the left] After all, if you really would like the yacht ——

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. No. — Give it to Blanche for a wedding present. [FOURCHAMBAULT laughs.]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: — *A room in BERNARD'S home, simply, severely furnished. — Entrances at the back and to the left. At the right, a fireplace; before it, a square table at one side of which is an armchair and the other an ordinary chair. Down-stage to the left, a sofa, and a chair beside it. MME. BERNARD is alone, examining a large book which lies on the table. Enter BERNARD a moment later.*

BERNARD. [*Goes to the chair where his mother is seated and leans over the book*] What a splendid book-keeper you are, Mother dear! Always at your accounts! [*She raises her head and kisses him on the forehead*]

MME. BERNARD. [*Smiling*] You would be very surprised, wouldn't you, if you were to find some fine morning, that I had left for Belgium?

BERNARD. Dumbfounded! You are not only the soul of order and economy in this house, but the spirit of prudence, of enterprise — you are its inspiration! You're not content with having made my fortune — and you have! Without you, I should never have had the instinct, the power of belief, to have confidence in the duration of the Civil War —

MME. BERNARD. Of course! But as to not being content —

BERNARD. — With administering this fortune the way Colbert would —

MME. BERNARD. What have I done, for that matter? — Stop your nonsense, now! I see you have some news —

BERNARD. Big news! Cartier suspended payment this morning, and the Cartier brothers have absconded.

MME. BERNARD. I always said they'd come to no good end. They were daredevils!

BERNARD. They've gone off with the cash-box.

MME. BERNARD. I'm not surprised. Daredevils, swindlers!

BERNARD. There's a general panic in town. Everyone had such confidence in them; I am about the only one who isn't touched by the catastrophe, — thanks to whom? To you, my Providence! You may well be proud of your far-sightedness.

MME. BERNARD. I made a man of myself the day I became your father. The inferiority of women is only the result of their being guarded. We develop only those powers we have need of. I needed all my powers, in order to do my duty: to keep you alive, educate you. My redemption in the eyes of God was to make an honest man of you, and in my own eyes to make you one of the happiest men in that world which cast me off. All the subtle will-power of the inner-being that other women possess, I applied to the struggle for existence. I have succeeded beyond all my hopes.

BERNARD. Dearest Mother! You have been father and mother to me. What's this talk about redemption? The calm surface of your life was stirred just once, only to lapse again into perfect quiet — my childhood was the proof, and what a proof childhood is! Come, I'm not envious of other sons who have to divide their affections among many; I shouldn't know how to do that. You see, I don't even wish to know the name of the man who refused to share me with you.

MME. BERNARD. I shall tell you his name when you have forgiven him as I have.

BERNARD. As you have —! Dear Lord!

MME. BERNARD. On that day, when you come to me frankly and ask me his name, I shall tell you.

BERNARD. [*Seriously*] That day has not yet come. [*With a change of voice*] When I came in, I'll wager you were at your continual occupation — your monomania — making out an inventory?

MME. BERNARD. Exactly. Do you know what your fortune amounts to to-day? Two millions — less three francs.

BERNARD. [*Searching in his pocket*] Here are the three francs — let's have a round sum.

MME. BERNARD. To whom will all this money eventually go?

BERNARD. [*Seated by the fireplace*] Oh, I'll will enough to start a foundlings' hospital.

MME. BERNARD. Wouldn't it be better to have children of your own?

BERNARD. [*Gaily, as he takes a seat facing his mother*] Marry? Are you still thinking about that?

MME. BERNARD. It would be a great consolation to have legitimate grandchildren!

BERNARD. Really, Mother, why go to all this trouble to conceal from me that I was not born in wedlock? What was the use in leaving your country and changing your name? Why do you live secluded and alone—if after all, some day, you will be forced to give evidence, at the mayor's and before witnesses, of my irregular birth? I thought we were agreed on that point.

MME. BERNARD. We are, my son—but an idea has just occurred to me that will settle everything: under your real name, we might rent a country house far away from here where I could live for six months, and where you could visit me from time to time. Six months is sufficient time to establish a domicile—I've enquired. You will get married there, and when you return to Le Havre with your wife, no one will ask to see your marriage license.

BERNARD. [*Rising*] And do you think we can find a family willing to enter into a scheme like that?

MME. BERNARD. You can marry an orphan.

BERNARD. We should have to take *her* into our confidence.

MME. BERNARD. You may be sure she would keep the secret.

BERNARD. [*Near his mother*] But I should want to keep her more than anyone else from knowing.—Let's change the subject.

MME. BERNARD. Ah, my son, how you blush for the blot I have stamped upon you!

BERNARD. I? Little I care! [*He kisses his mother*] All the more glory in store for me! If I were the only one concerned, I should cry it from the house-tops, that I owe everything in the world to your courage and my own. But my father's crime — which your mother-love has succeeded in hiding — I want to bury forever; that is purely a matter of filial respect. But you, I don't simply *adore* you — you're a religion to me! — And I tell you, if my wife didn't share my feelings — though I'm rather sensitive and timid — I think I should strangle her. Now do you understand why I have no desire to marry? [*He sits on the sofa*]

MME. BERNARD. [*Standing near him*] I understand, and I thank you. But don't you think there is some woman somewhere in the world who is broad-spirited enough to overlook, to pardon me my unhappy existence?

BERNARD. Yes: a woman who has suffered enough to understand.

MME. BERNARD. Marie Letellier, for instance?

BERNARD. Marie? Her only misfortunes have been financial; she would not understand any better than anyone else.

MME. BERNARD. Who knows? Will you let me try to find out?

BERNARD. [*Rising*] Never! What would be the good? Would she take me? Just look at me! I've never been handsome, and my adventurous life has not exactly improved my appearance. I'm fifteen years older than she, and I look more.

MME. BERNARD. What difference can that make? She knows all your good qualities; she's seen you at work. I am positive she would be proud to be your wife.

BERNARD. [*With a forced laugh*] My niece, rather! She calls me Uncle — there's the whole story. Don't deceive yourself, Mother dear; if Marie has leanings toward anyone, they're not toward sonny. At the Fourchambaults' there is a young man who is making love to her, and she considers him charming.

MME. BERNARD. What makes you think that?

BERNARD. She herself recognises her precarious position,

and asks me to get her out of the danger zone as soon as possible. For some days past I've been trying to find her a place as a French governess in an English family I know.

MME. BERNARD. Would Marie have to leave the country?

BERNARD. [*With an effort*] Yes. But I should prefer seeing her do that than stay where she is now. That little Léopold is a sharp rascal — he wouldn't stop short of anything.

MME. BERNARD. But Marie is perfectly honourable.

BERNARD. [*Becoming more and more excited*] I shall not insult her by doubting it; but we know to our sorrow how small a thing a promise of marriage is with people of that sort, and how little they regard it as a debt of honour. Oh, race of thieves, more damnably accursed than highway robbers — shall I ever get the chance to annihilate one of them?

MME. BERNARD. You frighten me — your eyes! — You're letting hatred get the better of you! — Against whom is it?

BERNARD. Do you ask?

MME. BERNARD. I've never seen you like this, — never!

BERNARD. [*Angrily*] Because I've always controlled my feelings out of regard for you! But the danger hovering over that poor girl has awakened all the bitterness of my heart against him — I hate him, although I don't even know him!

MME. BERNARD. Bernard! You forget — he is your father!

BERNARD. *He has forgotten that I am his son.*

MME. BERNARD. What if he never believed that?

BERNARD. [*Astonished*] Never believed it?

MME. BERNARD. [*Falling upon the sofa*] Those words have come to my lips a hundred times and like a coward I have kept them back. That is the saddest part of my unhappy past. You have awakened so much in my conscience, that it cried out in spite of myself.

BERNARD. Your conscience?

MME. BERNARD. Your father was an honest man, a good man — I have no right to make you despise him; and no matter how insufficient this explanation is —

BERNARD. [*Quickly*] I don't want to hear it, it's useless: I don't know the man, and I don't want to know him.

MME. BERNARD. He was not the guilty one.

BERNARD. [*Excitedly*] Who was, then?

MME. BERNARD. I — and his father! I, who supplied the grounds for an awful suspicion; his father, who took a mean advantage of me when I was away. — I went to Paris, to hide myself; there I received a letter, a short brutal letter, telling me that everything was broken off. He told me, without further explanation, that this father had opened his eyes for him.

BERNARD. But you went at once to accuse your seducer?

MME. BERNARD. [*Availing her eyes*] No.

BERNARD. No?

MME. BERNARD. Forgive me! I thought only of my pride — I wasn't a mother yet! And when you came into the world, I understood that I ought to have defended myself, for your sake — but it was too late; I had proclaimed myself guilty by remaining silent.

BERNARD. You were wise not to say anything. It was not your place to explain, it was *his* duty. — But don't call him a good man; a good man would never condemn a victim unheard — he never accepts a slander without certain proof.

MME. BERNARD. [*Turning aside her head*] Is it not the first punishment of a fallen woman to be suspected by the very man who caused her ruin? Every appearance is against her —

BERNARD. Appearances were of no importance; aren't you proof to the contrary, Mother? You have only to look! You've told me everything you have to say, haven't you? Now, not another word! [*Gesture from MME. BERNARD*] Please! It's as hard for me as for you! [*He goes to the door at the back*]

MME. BERNARD. Are you going?

BERNARD. I'm looking out for the ship Chauvet is on. I'm going to the pier. [*He goes out*]

MME. BERNARD. [*Alone*] Does he blame me for defending his father? Oh, he'll never forgive him! I shan't mention him again!

Enter an old SERVANT.

SERVANT. [*In an evening suit*] There are two ladies here who are very anxious to see you. They're collecting for something.

MME. BERNARD. Ask them to come in.

Enter MME. FOURCHAMBAULT and BLANCHE. Each carries a purse used for cash contributions which they are soliciting.

MME. BERNARD *motions them to sit down on the sofa; the guests sit down. MME. BERNARD then sits on a chair to one side.*

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Pardon our boldness, Madame. During the past month, it has been my privilege to be patroness of St. Joseph's Orphan Asylum, and one of my duties is to open a door which I know is always closed except to charity.

MME. BERNARD. I have already made a donation to the asylum which you are helping to support, but it shall never be said that you came from here empty-handed.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I expected no less, Madame, of your generosity. I have heard so much about you! Both of us love a very interesting young lady, Mlle. Letellier, who is now enjoying my hospitality.

MME. BERNARD. [*Rising abruptly; in a choked voice*] Are you Madame Fourchambault?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Also rising*] Madame Fourchambault, Madame! Allow me to introduce my daughter.

MME. BERNARD. Mademoiselle Blanche.

BLANCHE. Who has very much wanted to meet you, Madame, after all the good things Maïa has said of you. [*The ladies sit down again*]

MME. BERNARD. [*Concealing her agitation*] I wish she praised me less and came to see me oftener. She is neglecting me a little since you settled in Ingouville.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You will probably see her to-day; we are passing the day at Le Havre, where we spent the night.

We had a gala dinner last night at the Prefecture, and we are going to the theatre to-night — in the Prefect's box. — Oh, let me announce to you the engagement of my daughter to the young Baron Rastiboulois.

MME. BERNARD. My hearty congratulations, Mademoiselle!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. The banns are published: in a week this little girl will be a baroness. We sign the contract next Wednesday; I hope you will come to our little soirée — it will be quite a modest affair.

MME. BERNARD. I, Madame?

BLANCHE. Please, for your son's sake, and Maia's!

MME. BERNARD. It would be a great pleasure, ladies, but — my dress, you see?

BLANCHE. That's so: you're in mourning!

MME. BERNARD. I have worn it for many years — I shall never wear anything else.

BLANCHE. Is that why you don't go about, then?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Blanche!

MME. BERNARD. Yes, Mademoiselle.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I beg your pardon for causing you an unhappy thought. We regret very deeply that you cannot come, Madame. — Come, Blanche! [*She rises*]

BLANCHE. [*Picking up her pocketbook*] Remember the poor, please!

MME. BERNARD. We were forgetting. [*She opens, then closes her purse*] I haven't the right amount with me. Excuse me a moment; I'll be back shortly. [*She goes out, left*]

BLANCHE. Maia is right: she's very nice!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Not at all bad; she's gone to get her five-franc piece!

BLANCHE. How do you know?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. When she opened her purse I saw gold.

BLANCHE. Well, she's already given something.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That's true; but if she has any

sort of breeding she must know that people don't give collectors like me five-franc pieces. Why, everything looks so poor here! Look at the room! How cold!

BLANCHE. It is a trifle severe — there can't be much merrymaking in this place. It seems quite in harmony with Mme. Bernard's looks.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes, her looks! Can't you see, her everlasting mourning is only a form of economy! Do you believe in wearing mourning forever?

Enter the SERVANT.

SERVANT. [*Announcing*] Mlle. Letellier!

Enter MARIE.

MARIE. You here?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. You made us so curious to see Mme. Bernard — !

BLANCHE. We're here on a pretext of collecting for charity.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. She has gone to get a five-franc piece for us: she had nothing but gold in her purse.

MARIE. That's not like her.

Enter MME. BERNARD, left.

MME. BERNARD. [*Shaking hands with MARIE*] How are you, Marie? [*To BLANCHE*] Here is my contribution, Mademoiselle. [*To MARIE*] It seems as if I hadn't seen you for a century!

BLANCHE. A thousand-franc note, Mamma!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, it's too much, Madame!

MME. BERNARD. We can never give too much to the orphans.

BLANCHE. How they will bless you!

MME. BERNARD. [*Taking her hand*] May God bless you instead, my child! [*Smiling*] Let it be my wedding present!

BLANCHE. My nicest!

MARIE. [*Aside*] What a charming woman!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Dryly*] If everyone is as generous as you, Madame, we shall reap a wonderful harvest. — Come, Blanche!

BLANCHE. See you later, Maia — Thank you, Madame: you will bring us good luck!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*To* MME. BERNARD] Don't trouble to show us out, please: you have a visitor — [*Aside, as she stands on the threshold*] What ostentation!

BLANCHE and MME. FOURCHAMBAULT go out.

MME. BERNARD. Why does she seem so nettled?

MARIE. She headed the subscription list herself with 50 piasters — she is now outdistanced by 200 — it's a hard dose for her to swallow.

MME. BERNARD. [*Smiling*] Really! Tell her my gift is to be anonymous!

MARIE. That will put her in good humour again.

MME. BERNARD. Poor woman! My son says her moral sense is — underdeveloped.

MARIE. Your son holds her up to a rather difficult standard — and that standard is right under his eyes! Mme. Fourchambault is as honest as the average, you may be sure. Perhaps she is one of those people who like to deceive themselves, and see the stars at high noon! But she's really a very good sort of woman — with good business sense, except that sometimes she changes her monomanias!

MME. BERNARD. I see: obstinate and changeable at the same time.

MARIE. That's about it. She is like a spoiled child; we must forgive her and admit that she has compensating qualities!

MME. BERNARD. What?

MARIE. I'm thinking.

MME. BERNARD. Well, she accommodates herself to everyone! — Is her husband happy with her?

MARIE. I think so: he's not too particular — He's so good!

— Good, the way bread is good! It's his fate to be eaten! He lets himself be devoured without a single complaint — he's ground up into tiny crumbs!

MME. BERNARD. Why do you make fun of the poor man?

— That's not kind of you.

MARIE. It doesn't prevent my loving him, anyway!

Enter BERNARD.

BERNARD. [*Aside*] Marie! [*To MARIE*] How are you, Mademoiselle? [*He goes to the table*]

MARIE. How are you, M. Bernard?

MME. BERNARD. [*Leaving the sofa and going to her son*] Has Chauvet come?

BERNARD. Yes, he's going to take dinner with us to-night.

MME. BERNARD. Is he well?

BERNARD. [*Laying some papers on the table*] Splendid. [*To MARIE*] Papa Fourchambault *isn't* doing well, is he?

MARIE. How is that?

MME. BERNARD. Is he sick?

BERNARD. Not he! His business! — He's about to suspend payment.

MARIE. My God!

MME. BERNARD. Poor man!

BERNARD. [*To MARIE*] Didn't you know?

MARIE. No one in the family knows anything about it — The poor people!

BERNARD. He didn't want to confess he was ruined until the last resource failed.

MME. BERNARD. He was caught in that dreadful failure of Cartier Brothers, wasn't he?

BERNARD. He has 240,000 francs of their notes.

MME. BERNARD. And will he go bankrupt for so small a sum? The great House of Fourchambault!

BERNARD. Most of which must have been exterior decoration.

MME. BERNARD. His wife ruined him.

BERNARD. Shouldn't wonder! — The poor fellow is trying everywhere to get money — no one will let him have a sou. The very fact that he wants to borrow makes everyone suspicious; they had no idea he was so near disaster!

MARIE. But his friends — ?

MME. BERNARD. They are in danger too, because of him — or pretend to be — and are only too glad to find a pretext for refusing to help him.

MARIE. Oh, Madame! Do you mean that this honest man cannot find a single friend who will risk something to save his honour?

BERNARD. In business there are no friends!

MARIE. He has at least one! My farm is sold; I'm going to get 40,000 francs —

MME. BERNARD. Would you do that? That's a kind deed, my child!

BERNARD. It'll be only a drop in the bucket.

MARIE. That's so! But drops of water make rivers!

BERNARD. You seem to be deeply concerned for the honour of that family!

MARIE. Monsieur, I am. They took me in when I was in trouble, and I'll not leave them when they are in danger. If I'm the only one who will help them — I who have known them for so short a time — so much the worse for the others! — I'll see you later! [*She goes out*]

BERNARD. But, Mademoiselle —

MME. BERNARD. Let her do it.

BERNARD. Why do you say that?

MME. BERNARD. It's so good to see a kind act! Besides that will cost nothing: someone else is going to save M. Fourchambault!

BERNARD. [*Indifferently*] Yes? Who?

MME. BERNARD. [*Supplicating him*] You!

BERNARD. I? No! A thousand times no! I have no 40,000 francs to throw into the street!

MME. BERNARD. I ask you.

BERNARD. What's this fellow to you — ? you don't even know him?

MME. BERNARD. [*Ill at ease*] Do I need to know him? Marie's affection for him is sufficient to show that he deserves the help of any honest person. Should we be less generous than that poor child?

BERNARD. [*Crossly*] I'm not in love with M. Léopold! If I did give in to this idea of yours, I should be only postponing Fourchambault's ruin — it will be so much the worse when it comes. With a wife like his — he can't keep her from squandering — his position will always be as precarious as it has been: more so: his credit won't be good.

MME. BERNARD. [*Meditating*] That is true, we can't take half-way measures — that house needs to be ruled with an iron hand: yours! I don't ask you to do that, I command you!

BERNARD. Do you want me to go into partnership with that fool?

MME. BERNARD. That's the only way you could really be in control — and put things in order.

BERNARD. Why, this is absurd! If it's only a question of money, I — don't object! But how can I manage his private affairs?

MME. BERNARD. [*Rising to her full height*] You must — I wish it — it is your duty.

BERNARD. [*After a pause*] That man is my father.

MME. BERNARD. Yes.

BERNARD. Do you still love him?

MME. BERNARD. [*Simply*] No; but he is the only man I ever did love. I — beg you!

BERNARD. I shall do everything you ask — I shall look after his welfare as if it were my own. [MME. BERNARD *takes his hand and presses it to her lips*] But I don't have to tell him that I am his son, do I?

MME. BERNARD. No, certainly not! What would be the use? [*They sit side by side, his hand in hers*]

BERNARD. Good, but when I'm his partner, how can I prevent his coming here?

MME. BERNARD. My rooms are on a separate floor, you know.

BERNARD. He'll ask to meet you.

MME. BERNARD. You can tell him I never meet anyone — you can pretend that I object to your partnership.

BERNARD. But what if he should meet you some time, by accident? He might be coming in with me?

MME. BERNARD. He would not recognise me now. I thought of all these things before I let you settle in Le Havre. Once when you were in town on business, I arranged a meeting with M. Fourchambault.

BERNARD. And didn't he recognise you?

MME. BERNARD. He had not seen me for thirty years: my face had changed, and my name was not the same.

BERNARD. And he was preoccupied at the time! His rich marriage didn't succeed! Poor man! What a family! — There he is, his wife despising him and his children with no respect for him! How much better if he had married you!

MME. BERNARD. You forget: he thought I was to blame.

BERNARD. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] Oh, now! now! — Like many another, he chose to act according to conventional morality, not the real, lasting morality. He got his just punishment. Far be it from me to condemn him. It's good for him —

MME. BERNARD. Bernard!

BERNARD. Then it isn't good for him! — I'll get that 200,000 francs from the Bank —

MME. BERNARD. 240,000.

BERNARD. That's so, he must pay back Marie. Dear child! It was a splendid action! — [*Kissing his mother*] I — adore you! [*He goes out, back*]

MME. BERNARD. [*She stands with upturned eyes*] God be praised!

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE:— *The drawing-room in the FOURCHAMBAULTS' home, at Le Havre. — At the back there is a mantel-piece, between two windows. There is a door on either side of the room, up-stage, and one down-stage to the right. Down-stage to the left is a table. Two double chairs are near the mantel-piece; a small sofa, centre; another table, right. LÉOPOLD is discovered alone.*

LÉOPOLD. [*He has his hat on, and is putting on his gloves. Looking at the clock*] Three o'clock! Why should I go to the office? Well, to satisfy Father! [*He yawns*] Doesn't take me long to get used to doing without the club! Well, I've made up for lost sleep last night! To bed at five A. M., and up at two in the afternoon — that's just right. Didn't sleep very well, though: dreamed that Maïa was married to that pirate of the high seas — I was furious at the thought! [*He yawns again*] I'm fearfully empty! Oh, of course: I haven't had any lunch! [*He rings the bell, and a servant appears at the door, left*] Bring me a glass of Malaga and some biscuits — a lot of biscuits —

The SERVANT goes out. Enter BLANCHE, right. She wears the same dress as in the second act, and carries a riding-whip wrapped in paper.

BLANCHE. Here we are!

LÉOPOLD. Who, we?

BLANCHE. Mother and I, of course. Oh, you needn't look for her, she's not hidden in my skirt. She went straight to her room, where the notary is waiting. He has some important news for her. [*She sits on the sofa*]

LÉOPOLD. It's probably about the contract.

BLANCHE. Probably. — Guess where we've been?

LÉOPOLD. At Mme. Rastiboulois', of course.

BLANCHE. No! Between last night's dinner and to-night's theatre I haven't as yet been consumed with a desire to see my mother-in-law-to-be.

LÉOPOLD. Mother should have been.

BLANCHE. She was — a little bit, but I dissuaded her. It was not easy, she's like a little child — she thinks she's a baroness and a prefect's wife at the same time. If this marriage were to fall through, she'd go into a decline.

LÉOPOLD. But it can't — matters have gone so far! If you haven't come from the Prefecture, where on earth have you come from?

BLANCHE. Mme. Bernard's.

LÉOPOLD. Ha! Ha! What sort of person is she?

BLANCHE. Very distinguished-looking. You've lost your bet, poor old Léopold. I've been wanting a riding-whip, so I bought this on my way home. They'll send you the bill.

LÉOPOLD. Don't put that among your wedding-presents: it might remind you of your husband-to-be!

BLANCHE. He hasn't anything to fear — if he doesn't begin again.

Enter a SERVANT, carrying a bottle of Malaga and some biscuits on a tray.

SERVANT. There, Monsieur!

BLANCHE. For you? Are you just having lunch?

LÉOPOLD. [*Sitting down and dipping a biscuit into the wine*] This is the first thing I've had to eat to-day.

BLANCHE. Why, Germain told us you were to take lunch in town.

LÉOPOLD. I instructed him to tell that pious lie — then I went to sleep again.

BLANCHE. Lazy! We didn't come home so late last night!

LÉOPOLD. I know; but I'm not sure whether it was the bad champagne or the strange bed —

BLANCHE. It must have been the bed! It's a long time since you slept on the carpet — you must be nearly dead!

LÉOPOLD. What do you mean?

BLANCHE. Will you wager that you didn't spend the night at the club? Ten louis!

LÉOPOLD. And fifty I lost: total, sixty! No, thanks!

BLANCHE. After such splendid resolutions! What weather-cocks men are!

LÉOPOLD. Well, Miss Preacher, for your edification let me state that what I did was a noble deed. It seems that Maia has been slightly compromised by my patriarchal manners; now, as it is not in my character to compromise ladies —

BLANCHE. You prefer to ruin them?

LÉOPOLD. [*Nervously*] Yes! [*Getting hold of himself*] What are you talking about, child?

BLANCHE. I beg your pardon, Monsieur, it just slipped out. I thought I was a week older than I am; in a week, you know, I'll have the right to say a lot of things that I ought not to think to-day. [*Enter MARIE, right. She stands by the door*] Funny, isn't it?

LÉOPOLD. Yes, very.

MARIE. [*Aside*] I wonder if they know yet? — Has your father come in?

LÉOPOLD. No, he's at the office — where I'm not! [*The clock strikes*] Half past! What a row I'm in for! Pray for me, Maia. [*He goes out*]

BLANCHE. Fool! He's kept me here half an hour: I'll go and fix my hair and be back at once. [*She goes out, right, down-stage*]

MARIE. [*Standing near the mantel-piece*] M. Fourchambault's absence can mean only bad news! Poor people! What a blow!

Enter FOURCHAMBAULT, at the back. He crosses the stage, and sits on one of the double chairs down-stage. MARIE goes to him.

MARIE. Well, have you found it?

FOURCHAMBAULT. What?

MARIE. What you were looking for? I know all about your trouble!

FOURCHAMBAULT. Do the others here know it?

MARIE. Not yet.

FOURCHAMBAULT. No, I've found nothing.

MARIE. I was luckier than you: I've found 40,000 francs for you. [*She opens a small pocket-book and takes some bank-notes from it*]

FOURCHAMBAULT. Where did you get these?

MARIE. [*Lowering her eyes*] From someone who doesn't want his name known!

FOURCHAMBAULT. How can I give him a receipt?

MARIE. He doesn't want one: he trusts you.

FOURCHAMBAULT. How can I repay him?

MARIE. I'll take it to him.

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Rising, deeply touched*] Take it to him now: these 40,000 francs can't save me. He can make better use of them than I can! [*Aside*] *She is too generous not to be poor!* [*Taking MARIE'S hands in his*] Thank you, dear child, I appreciate this! But keep your little fortune, I don't need it. I am going to do the only thing I can do: ask Mme. Fourchambault.

MARIE. What?

FOURCHAMBAULT. She is rich. I have no right to touch her personal fortune without her consent. I know she'll force me to pay a high rate for my money, but there's nothing else to do. And yet my present condition is due to her. I've been anything but happy!

MARIE. And a little *your* fault, too.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I know that. My wife is really not so much to blame; I've been too indulgent with her. I can't, somehow, bear to refuse anything to anybody — and then, I detest argument. Look, see how my hand is trembling! I'm afraid to see my wife!

MARIE. Courage! She can't refuse.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Here she is.

Enter MME. FOURCHAMBAULT, down-stage, right.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Well, Monsieur, was I so wrong when I advised you to let Léopold take care of your business? Stay, Marie! — If you had only listened to me, we wouldn't be where we are to-day!

FOURCHAMBAULT. How could Léopold have done any better than I?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Never mind that. I could show you that too easily — only I don't like to strike a man when he's down. I blame you for one thing only: you should have spoken to me instead of to strangers, and letting the whole town find out about the terrible condition your business was in. You make people think your wife has no heart, no sense! I can't forgive you for that.

MARIE. [*Aside to FOURCHAMBAULT*] What did I say?

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*To his wife*] I confess I was wrong. But Maïa will tell you that I was going to ask you for the help you are generous enough to offer me.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I? I'm not offering you anything! This morning I should have, but now, what's the use? Everyone knows about it. All my money couldn't save you now — my notary just told me.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Then do you want me to file for bankruptcy? I should never live through the shame!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I'm just as ashamed as you! Such a pitiful little bankruptcy! Well, the only thing now is to think of the children's future —

MARIE. And — honour?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. It's not a question of honour. M. Fourchambault will have to give way to force — as my notary said.

MARIE. But if you are still rich after he is bankrupt, the dishonour will be yours.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. My dear child, you're a little savage. Such things as this occur every day in Europe; we don't do such quixotic things as you imply. No one would blame us!

MARIE. Except your husband — and his creditors. Savage or not, Madame, the man whose name I bear never need be ashamed so long as I have independent means to help him!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Dryly*] A fine theory!

FOURCHAMBAULT. She offered me all her fortune.

MARIE. And I offer it again.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Aside*] Can she be fishing for a husband? — It's very nice, Mademoiselle, and does you credit, but I am first and foremost a mother. He's asking me for my children's dowry. I refuse.

Enter LÉOPOLD. He overhears his mother's last words.

LÉOPOLD. [*Quickly*] Refuse for my sister, but not for me!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Now he comes and —! This is the last straw!

LÉOPOLD. You are the only one who can save us! I don't understand why you hesitate?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. To throw the little we have into the street, where your father has thrown the rest?

LÉOPOLD. Don't blame him.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Whom should I blame? He's lacked business "go" all his life, and now he lacks commonsense — perfect!

LÉOPOLD. [*Forcefully*] What you call lack of business "go" was merely friendly confidence in the business men of Le Havre; what you call lack of commonsense, I call his business honour — the honour of our family, and I thank him for protecting it from the bottom of my heart! Father, you needn't be ashamed, your children are with you!

FOURCHAMBAULT. My son!

MARIE. Good, Léopold!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. If we act on our feelings, everything is lost. Don't mix sentiment with business — as my notary said. You may all be against me; I'll take matters in hand for everybody in this house — I'm the only one who can manage things. Some day you'll thank me.

LÉOPOLD. But, Mother —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That's my last word.

SERVANT. [*Announcing*] Monsieur Bernard.

LÉOPOLD. A visit, at this time!

Enter BERNARD. He is very nervous, and stops at the door.

LÉOPOLD goes to him.

LÉOPOLD. I beg your pardon, Monsieur, but you have interrupted a family conference —

BERNARD. I shall not be in the way. [*To FOURCHAMBAULT*] I understand, Monsieur, that you need 240,000 francs? I have the money here.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Monsieur —?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Aside*] What luck!

LÉOPOLD. [*Aside*] I'd rather be under obligations to any other man on earth than him!

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*To BERNARD*] The moment those whom I had a right to count on fail me, you, Monsieur, who owe me nothing — God bless you! You — have saved my life!

LÉOPOLD. Your life?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Do you imagine I should have lived after this disgrace?

BERNARD. [*Aside*] A man of honour!

FOURCHAMBAULT. How grateful I am, Monsieur —!

BERNARD. [*Coldly*] There is no question of gratitude, Monsieur. This is not so much a service I am rendering you, as a pure business proposition.

LÉOPOLD. [*Aside*] That's better!

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Sitting on a chair, left, and motioning BERNARD to sit down*] Two birds with one stone, then! —

BERNARD. This is what I propose: I believe that the House of Fourchambault can be put on its feet again, and I offer to become not your creditor, but your partner. What do you say to that?

FOURCHAMBAULT. What do I say? Your money is welcome, but your name —! Why, that alone would be enough

to give me full credit again, and then your energy and experience

BERNARD. Good! Then you accept?

FOURCHAMBAULT. I should think I did! [*He offers to shake hands with BERNARD; BERNARD hesitates a moment before shaking FOURCHAMBAULT'S hand*]

BERNARD. [*Rising*] Done! Hand-shake before the contract, like the immersion at home before the baptism.¹ Introduce me at your office to-day as your partner.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Allow the family to thank you sincerely, Monsieur!

LÉOPOLD. [*Coldly*] I trust, Monsieur, that you will find the arrangement as profitable for yourself as for us!

BERNARD. [*Coldly*] I make the offer in that hope. Shall we go into your office, M. Fourchambault? We have some important matters to discuss.

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Leading the way*] This way, please!

BERNARD. [*To MARIE, who shakes his hand warmly, in the passage-way*] Are you glad?

MARIE. Oh, yes!

BERNARD and FOURCHAMBAULT go out, left.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. What great luck!

MARIE. To think that he was so near all the time! And we never suspected! When I think of what M. Fourchambault said he would have done —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I shouldn't have let him do that! Poor old fellow! I had to summon up all my will-power to refuse him! Now all's well that ends well — oh, no: everything's not ended!

LÉOPOLD. What's the matter?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Your sister's marriage?

LÉOPOLD. Are you afraid they'll want to break it off?

¹ In France it is often customary for the parents to baptize their child formally at home, before the church ceremony.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. The House of Fourchambault is under a cloud!

LÉOPOLD. It will come out soon!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I hope so, but between a house under a cloud, and one in full prosperity, like that of the Duhamels —

LÉOPOLD. The Baron is too proud to break it off for a matter of money!

MARIE. [*Insinuatingly*] Madame means that it would be more gracious to give them a chance of refusing?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I? I don't mean that at all!

LÉOPOLD. Well, you are wrong — Marie is perfectly right. We ought to give them the opportunity.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. And what if the Baron accepts?

LÉOPOLD. He will do a shameful and dishonourable deed: that's all.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That's all? And what about Blanche?

MARIE. I really think she wouldn't very much regret her fiancé!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That isn't the question: the banns are published, the invitations sent out for the signing of the contract, the trousseau linen is all marked with a crown —

LÉOPOLD. Take off the crown!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. People will laugh at us!

LÉOPOLD. Let them laugh! They'd rather make fun of the prefect! You know France! And then, for that matter, what of it? Let us act honourably, no matter what happens. Father will have to go to the Prefecture; the sooner the better —

GERMAIN. [*Announcing*] M. le baron Rastiboulois.

LÉOPOLD. The Baron!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. So soon!

Enter RASTIBOULOIS.

RASTIBOULOIS. What is this I hear, my poor friends? May I speak before Mademoiselle?

LÉOPOLD. She is one of the family!

RASTIBOULOIS. [*Aside*] So they say! — Believe me when I say that no one more than I feels so keenly this misfortune that has come to you! My son is hard hit by the blow — he loved Mademoiselle Blanche so deeply!

LÉOPOLD. Loved? He doesn't love her any longer, then?

RASTIBOULOIS. I don't say that — but you understand —?

LÉOPOLD. We understand so well that my father was about to give you the opportunity of refusing. We regret that you were put to the trouble of coming first!

RASTIBOULOIS. I should have expected no less from your sense of what is fitting.

LÉOPOLD. But we should have expected more from your sense of courtesy.

RASTIBOULOIS. Oh, I —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. In a word, you wish to break off the match —?

[RASTIBOULOIS. Alas, Madame, as a father, as a magistrate, as a gentleman —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I thought you were above monetary considerations —

RASTIBOULOIS. [*Rather sharply*] Ah, money! Your ruin if anything would have brought us closer together: the only question in my mind hitherto was the disparity of our fortunes. I have said that continually, proclaimed it in the streets of Le Havre. What would Le Havre say now, what would all France say if Rastiboulois were to take back his word like the lowest of serfs? No, no, Madame, if I withdraw now it is solely because bankruptcy stares you in the face!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Bankruptcy? I don't understand?

RASTIBOULOIS. Why, M. Fourchambault's —?

LÉOPOLD. There is no question of bankruptcy, Monsieur.

RASTIBOULOIS. [*In consternation*] What? Isn't your father about to suspend payment?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Who told you that?

RASTIBOULOIS. Why — your notary, Madame, who is likewise my own.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. To-morrow we shall open our windows as usual. All payments will be made.

RASTIBOULOIS. Indeed! Oh, I'm charmed, charmed —

MARIE. [*Aside*] That's not hard to see!

RASTIBOULOIS. Madame, you are making a great and noble sacrifice!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. There is no sacrifice at all, Monsieur!

RASTIBOULOIS. [*Stupefied*] Then you are not paying the deficit? Who then?

LÉOPOLD. M. Bernard.

RASTIBOULOIS. M. Bernard!

LÉOPOLD. Who has just entered into partnership with my father.

RASTIBOULOIS. [*Agreeably surprised*] Partnership? Ah, that's different! Why couldn't you tell me that at once? This good fortune you have richly deserved, my dear friends! That's a bit of news that will take the wind out of the sails of the Duhamels! I shan't be sorry; they haven't acted very friendly to you in this business, I tell you. Ha! Ha! They thought they would be alone in the field now! Ha! Ha! I can see their faces when they hear that M. Bernard is your partner —

LÉOPOLD. Silent partner.

RASTIBOULOIS. What is his share in the business? What did he put in?

LÉOPOLD. 240,000 francs.

RASTIBOULOIS. No more? You know the partner can't be held for more than he has originally paid?

LÉOPOLD. And for that reason we are giving you the chance of refusing a second time.

MARIE. But what would Le Havre say? What would France say?

RASTIBOULOIS. [*Dryly*] Mademoiselle, I am glad I was

told you were of the family! [*To himself*] Fool! She could have got me out of this beautifully! — France will say, my jocose young friend, that Rastiboulois is faithful to his motto: "One heart, one promise." I have given both, Madame, and I take back neither.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Ah, Baron, I have found the real Baron again!

RASTIBOULOIS. On the field of honour — as always!

MARIE. [*Aside*] Too much plume!¹

RASTIBOULOIS. [*Hypocritically*] I cannot tell you, my dear friends, my — relatives, how happy I am over the outcome of this little conference! I wish Fourchambault were here; I'd like to take him in my arms.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. He is conferring with his partner.

RASTIBOULOIS. Oh, don't disturb him. To-night we'll have a time of it: don't forget, I am taking you all to the theatre!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. We shan't forget, never fear!

RASTIBOULOIS. I hope Mlle. Letellier will give me the pleasure of joining the company?

MARIE. [*Formally*] Too good of you, Monsieur.

RASTIBOULOIS. Not at all — it's merely a hobby of mine: a horticulturist who delights in collecting roses!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Please, Baron!

LÉOPOLD. [*Aside*] Fatuousness!

RASTIBOULOIS. [*Bowing*] Madame! Till this evening, Mademoiselle.

MARIE. Thank you, Monsieur.

RASTIBOULOIS. I thank you! [*Aside*] Yes, I do! [*He goes out*]

LÉOPOLD. I'm sorry the trousseau linen is marked!

MARIE. Poor child! What good are all her qualities if she's to be bartered like that?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. This is Europe, my dear.

¹ An allusion to a famous saying of Henri IV, to the effect that he was always to be found upon the field of honor — "sur le chemin de l'honneur" — and might be distinguished by his plume — "panache."

MARIE. What a fine European your Baron is! If he thinks I'm going to accept his invitation —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Why did you seem to accept it just now?

MARIE. He accepted for me. You'll excuse me to-night, won't you?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. If you like.

LÉOPOLD. Excuse me, too, will you?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. No, not you.

LÉOPOLD. I didn't sleep a wink last night!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Neither did I, but that's no reason — [*Aside*] He wants to stay alone with her! — Listen to me: come to my box, if only for fifteen minutes.

LÉOPOLD. I can't refuse that.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Taking him aside*] And remember your grandfather's wise words: "The worst sin is to marry a girl without a dowry."

Enter FOURCHAMBAULT and BERNARD.

BERNARD and FOURCHAMBAULT. Ah, here we are. [*To LÉOPOLD and MARIE*] Children, we have to confer with Mme. Fourchambault.

LÉOPOLD. Does M. Bernard think I'm too young?

BERNARD. Stay if you like!

LÉOPOLD. I'd rather go. [*Offering his hand to MARIE*] I'm very glad, Mademoiselle, to be driven from this — paradise!

BERNARD *shrugs his shoulders.*

MARIE. [*Smiling*] A paradise — but without the apple!

LÉOPOLD. Unfortunately!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Aside*] Little impudence! [*LÉOPOLD and MARIE go out*]

FOURCHAMBAULT. Speak, M. Bernard.

BERNARD. You have the floor, Monsieur.

FOURCHAMBAULT. No, you.

BERNARD. Very well. We have gone over the whole

situation, Madame, and are agreed on the first point: a modification of your household arrangements.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*To her husband*] What, modify my household arrangements?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes, my dear; M. Bernard thinks that certain economies —

BERNARD. To sum the matter up: you spend 120,000 francs a year; we believe that you can do very well — keep your house on a very respectable and honourable footing — with 40,000.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. With 40,000! Tell me how, Monsieur.

BERNARD. Gladly, Madame: it's very simple. You now have six horses, ten servants, a house at Le Havre, a villa at Ingouville —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Throwing her ring of keys on the table*] There are my keys, Monsieur! That's the simplest way of all!

FOURCHAMBAULT. Now, now, now, don't get angry —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. If I have to bow down to a stranger in my own house —

FOURCHAMBAULT. M. Bernard is not a stranger, he is my partner. He is defending our common interests — it is his right.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. And what rights have I? Didn't I bring you 800,000 francs when I married you? Is it right for you to reduce our expenses to 40,000 francs a year — that's only the interest on my dowry? Do you think it's right to live on me?

BERNARD. Oh, Madame, I am defending your husband's and your own rights as well as you are, and preserving your husband's dignity. Let us just see what this dowry amounts to; you make a great point of it. It seems that M. Fourchambault neither cares for nor can afford this annual expenditure of 120,000 francs.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, no!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Between her teeth*] Coward!

BERNARD. Of these 120,000 francs, you supply 40,000. Your husband therefore, spends 80,000 francs a year. Now he has done this for about thirty years. Figure up how many times you have spent your dowry, and then let us drop the subject.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Going to her husband*] What's this?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Just three times, my dear.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Astonished*] Oh!

BERNARD. M. Fourchambault will make you out a budget which we shall arrange, and upon which we shall be ready to hear your opinion.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. I won't let you have it, Monsieur!

BERNARD. So much the better. — Now, Monsieur, let us carry our money to your cashier for his payments to-morrow. At your service, Madame. [*He opens the door at the back, right, and awaits FOURCHAMBAULT*]

FOURCHAMBAULT. Till later, dear. [*Aside*] Poor, poor dear! [*They go out*]

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Angrily*] That Bernard! The brutal —! [*Sentimentally*] That's the kind of husband I ought to have had!

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE: — *Same as in Act III.* — MME. FOURCHAMBAULT and a SERVANT are present.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Ask M. Léopold to come here a moment.

SERVANT. Monsieur has gone riding with Mlle. Blanche and Mlle. Letellier.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Good. Well, then, when they return! [*The SERVANT goes out*] They wanted to say good-bye to the stables. — Poor children! That Maïa seems set on trot-

ting around after my son. — Of course, Blanche is with them —! But people are so suspicious nowadays! We can't afford to have any more gossip at this time. Hm! only last night the Prefect made me say more than I intended.

Enter FOURCHAMBAULT, right.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Well, dear, how do you like your finance minister? And the budget?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Rising*] Not at all.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Ha! But last night it seemed that the Prefect had pretty well convinced you of the advantage of Bernard's reforms! You know I have cut down only as much as I had to.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That is exactly what I object to. Somehow you can never be reasonable; you can't do things by halves. Last night the Prefect made a very profound remark — it would do you good to remember it — there are only two things which can keep up appearances for a business founded on credit: parsimony or prodigality.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Very profound, indeed. But you see, I wanted to make the transition easier for you.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. No transition! Here's another thing the Prefect said: You who were once the Mother of the Graces, become now the Mother of the Gracchi!¹

FOURCHAMBAULT. I don't see the point.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. It's clear enough: after having reigned as Queen of Fashion, I must compensate the brilliancy of my reign by the brilliancy of my abdication. I want people to see me pass through the streets, on foot, in a plain woolen dress, and I want them to say: "There is the woman who wishes no other jewels than her children."

FOURCHAMBAULT. Now I see!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Giving him the papers she has been holding*] That's good. Now you may reduce the budget: toilette, carriages, footmen —

¹ An attempted pun on "Graces" and "Gracques."

FOURCHAMBAULT. We mustn't go to extremes — we should keep at least one carriage and one horse.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. No, no — no shabby-genteel respectability! Nothing middle-class! We have sufficiently noble connections not to blush for our aristocratic simplicity.

FOURCHAMBAULT. But a carriage for a banker is economy.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Just as it is for a doctor. Well, I don't believe in professional carriages. Take a cab when you need one.

FOURCHAMBAULT. But, my dearest —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Are *you* objecting to these reforms now? I shall speak to M. Bernard.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I'll take the cab!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. And don't forget to cancel the lease for our villa at Ingouville — to-day! You know, to-morrow will be too late — you mustn't renew the lease.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Yes, they will renew it as a matter of course. I'll write a letter to the proprietor.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Of course we have the right to sublet this house —

FOURCHAMBAULT. I don't want you to be deprived of everything.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Poverty from now on is going to be my luxury. On my grave I want the words: "She stayed at home; she wore cotton."

FOURCHAMBAULT. Your grave, dear! We're far from that!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Who knows? Our bodies are frail things — I feel that.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Nonsense!

Enter BLANCHE, *at the back, in riding-clothes, a wallet slung over her shoulders.*

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Alone? Where is Léopold? And Maïa?

BLANCHE. [*Sitting to the left of the table*] I beat them by a mile! Of course, I had Roland!

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Pointing to the wallet*] What's that?

BLANCHE. Paper wallet. — We've been playing a game — Rally Papers —! It was such fun!

FOURCHAMBAULT. Rally Papers? What's that?

BLANCHE. [*Laying her whip on the table. — To her mother*] Shall I tell him?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh! I don't care!

BLANCHE. [*To FOURCHAMBAULT*] Sort of chase: one rider is a deer; he's given five minutes' start. He has a bag of papers which he throws away as he rides: that's the trail. He's got to put the hounds off the scent, see? I was the deer, and I escaped the others. They're looking for me up hill and down dale —

Enter MARIE, left, in street-costume.

BLANCHE. [*Rising*] Here already? And changed so soon?

MARIE. I gave up when I lost the scent — I came back by a short-cut.

FOURCHAMBAULT. And Léopold?

MARIE. I left him arguing with his horse at the edge of a ditch. They may have come to an understanding by now. I don't know!

BLANCHE. And I thought I was being pursued! I wasn't. — That's funny, now, isn't it?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. The child is wet through with perspiration. Quick, go and change. [*She conducts BLANCHE to the door, left*]

BLANCHE. Don't bother.

FOURCHAMBAULT. She'll ring for Justine.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. What, leave my child in mercenary hands?

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Aside*] Cornelia!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*To BLANCHE*] Quick! Don't get cold! [*To her husband*] Don't forget to write to the landlord!

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Going to the right*] At once! [MME. FOURCHAMBAULT and BLANCHE go out, left. *Aside*] If I had

to choose my pose, I'd choose the one she's taking now. — At least, it's cheaper than the other! [*He sends a kiss to MARIE, who has remained at the door, back. Then he goes out, right*]

MARIE. [*Following FOURCHAMBAULT with her eyes*] The dear good man! I am profoundly happy to be able to help save him! How grateful I am to M. Bernard! He has a good heart! [*To LÉOPOLD who enters at the back*] At last!

LÉOPOLD. I'm very angry!

MARIE. At the horse?

LÉOPOLD. No, at you.

MARIE. What have I done?

LÉOPOLD. Take advantage of me, and gallop off full speed, making a face at me — do you think that was nice?

MARIE. I admit the face wasn't nice, but really, you were too funny!

LÉOPOLD. You're just proud because your horse *would* leap without being urged. While mine — ! An everyday occurrence!

MARIE. But what isn't of everyday occurrence is a ditch which cuts in half a declaration of love: a gallant lover punctuating his tender advances with "Whoa! Get up, there!" while the amazon laughs at him. You must admit that's funny — you're leaving that declaration at the bottom of the ditch.

LÉOPOLD. What if it attempted to climb out?

MARIE. I have a magic formula to send it back.

LÉOPOLD. I confess I was a bit ridiculous — but what I felt for you was not — that is: deep and sincere. You hadn't been here three days before I fairly quivered — and to-day —

MARIE. Whoa! — Go on!

LÉOPOLD. No — I can't — now!

MARIE. In the ditch? What did I tell you?

LÉOPOLD. I hate you!

MARIE. [*Sitting down by the table*] This has no more truth in it than what you said before.

LÉOPOLD. Which is as much as saying that you believe me incapable of a single serious thought?

MARIE. Yes, little Léopold!

LÉOPOLD. What if I should prove some day that I am?

MARIE. Oh, then I shouldn't laugh at you.

LÉOPOLD. What proof do you want, if all I have given you are not enough?

MARIE. What proof — ? — Oh, — I don't know —

LÉOPOLD. But — you — you've completely changed me. What all the arguments of my family have failed to accomplish, you have done — a single look from you did the work. If you knew what a useless sort of fellow I was before I met you, you would be very proud of your influence over me. You don't think that's much, do you? I beg to differ. No matter how humble the creature, it is a wonderful thing to have brought it into being — and this creature is of your own making. You have made a new man of me.

MARIE. In any event I have done you a good turn.

LÉOPOLD. [*Sitting near her*] One that will make me unhappy forever, if you refuse to love me. Oh, my dear Maïa! Don't despise your work — finish it — you can with a single word.

MARIE. Are you then really serious?

LÉOPOLD. Very!

MARIE. My dear friend, you are out of your mind! What would your mother say if she heard you?

LÉOPOLD. She doesn't, and she shan't! I'll hide my happiness from her, from the whole world! [*MARIE listens to the rest of what LÉOPOLD says, with downcast eyes, her eyebrows contracted*] Oh, Maïa! This union, so free, so mysterious! Think of the joy of overriding the silly conventions and prejudices of society — to belong to one another — What a dream! Say that one word, dearest, and my life is yours! [*He kneels at her feet*]

MARIE. [*Irritated, rising abruptly*] Stand up! [*LÉOPOLD gets up. She looks at him for an instant, and shrugs her shoulders*] You are foolish, poor Léopold! And we were such good friends!

LÉOPOLD. Sh! Father!

Enter FOURCHAMBAULT, a letter in his hand.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You there! Good! I want you to saddle your horse.

LÉOPOLD. But I've just been riding.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Ride again. Secret errand. Take this letter to Ingouville, give it to the proper person, and wait for an answer.

LÉOPOLD. Very well, Papa. [*Aside*] She made a face, then! [*He goes out at the back*]

MARIE. [*Aside*] It was bound to come to that!

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Rubbing his hands*] Reforms, my dear Maïa, reforms! My wife is more eager for them than I. Bernard has only to suggest. What a man, my dear! What a man!

MARIE. Then I leave you in safe hands. I go with no misgivings.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Are you thinking of leaving us?

MARIE. I must; the sooner the better.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Because we are forced to economise?

MARIE. No, my friend, but I must think of my future.

BERNARD appears at the back.

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Not seeing BERNARD*] We'll see to getting you a situation.

BERNARD. [*Advancing, to FOURCHAMBAULT*] Good! [*To MARIE*] It's found!

MARIE. [*Rising*] Thank you! It couldn't have happened at a better time!

FOURCHAMBAULT. Ungrateful!

MARIE. No, not ungrateful, but reasonable and resolute!

BERNARD. But you must leave France — go to England.

MARIE. [*Surprised*] Is it so advantageous, then?

BERNARD. I should not have mentioned it if I weren't quite sure I was putting you into the hands of an exceptionally good and honourable family. I have not relied merely on

hearsay, I myself have investigated. I have been talking things over with Sir John Sunter for the past week —

FOURCHAMBAULT. The owner of the yacht?

BERNARD. [*Smiling*] I am the owner of the yacht.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You buy yachts then? Just like my wife? What the devil's the use of that?

BERNARD. So far it has served to make the acquaintance of Sir John Sunter.

MARIE. How obliging you are, M. Bernard!

BERNARD. I shall also be in a position to visit Brighton from time to time, and see whether our little friend likes her young pupils.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Ah! Personally, I am subject to seasickness, but I hope you'll take me along occasionally.

MARIE. Thank you, thank you, my dear kind friends! You give me courage to go into exile. When must I give my answer?

BERNARD. You have twenty-four hours to think the matter over.

MARIE. I shall consider it well.

BERNARD. And now, M. Fourchambault! [*To MARIE, who is about to leave*] No, you may stay! — I understand that the Prefect's son is going to marry your daughter.

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Sitting down at the table*] That's so: I forgot to tell you. Pardon me, but so many things have been happening since yesterday —

BERNARD. You approve of this marriage?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Well — yes and no.

MARIE. [*Seated to the left of the table*] Mme. Fourchambault is very much attached to the idea.

BERNARD. [*Sitting down opposite FOURCHAMBAULT*] And you are going to sacrifice your daughter for the sake of your wife's vanity?

FOURCHAMBAULT. I beg your pardon, my friend, but really — do you pretend to be more interested in my daughter than either my wife or myself?

BERNARD. I have no right, of course, but my duty requires

me to think of a splendid young man whom this marriage will drive to despair.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Who is that?

BERNARD. My associate, Victor Chauvet.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I thought he was in Calcutta?

MARIE. He arrived here yesterday.

BERNARD. And that was the news he received when he landed. He came to me this morning, heart-broken, and told me — I knew nothing about it. I was deeply grieved to see him sobbing. He loves your daughter, and I know he would make her happy.

FOURCHAMBAULT. I'm sure he would! But my wife won't listen to it! She is the one who supplies the dowry, you see!

BERNARD. But Chauvet asks for nothing — he'll take her without a dowry —

MARIE. [*Standing behind the table, to FOURCHAMBAULT*] Without a dowry!

FOURCHAMBAULT. That's a possible solution, but — no! Blanche loves the little Baron!

BERNARD. Impossible! Victor felt sure when he left that she loved him, and Victor is no fool. Influence was doubtless brought to bear on the little girl — the baronetcy was dangled before her eyes —

FOURCHAMBAULT. I can't do anything!

BERNARD. No, but you can at least lay the truth before her, so that afterward she will have no reason to blame you for being an accomplice of her mother in this regrettable marriage.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Really, I am — you say things I should never have thought of.

MARIE. Think now, then!

BERNARD. It's high time!

Enter BLANCHE.

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*To BERNARD*] Here she is — you speak to her!

BERNARD. [*Rising*] If you like.—Mademoiselle Blanche?

BLANCHE. Monsieur?

BERNARD. Do you really love that little Rastiboulois?

BLANCHE. I think that hardly concerns you. [*Going to her father*]. Why should he meddle in this affair?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Speak to him as to our best friend. Do you love your fiancé?

MARIE. Can she?

BLANCHE. Love is not indispensable. As marriage is the only thing open to a young lady, it makes very little difference who the husband happens to be. The career of baroness is rather attractive to me.

BERNARD. [*Ironically*] And the career of an honest woman is not?

BLANCHE. Is it impossible then to be an honest woman and a baroness at the same time?

MARIE. No, if the lady loves the baron; otherwise —

BERNARD. But there are ninety-nine chances out of a hundred that she doesn't — and then — pftt!

FOURCHAMBAULT. Monsieur Bernard!

BERNARD. Yes?

FOURCHAMBAULT. My friend, you shouldn't speak of such things before young ladies!

BERNARD. I should like to know why not?

FOURCHAMBAULT. It's not hard to see you have no sister!

BERNARD. Heavens and earth! If I had, I should see to it that she knew what she was doing in becoming engaged! I hardly think I should make a delicate and dainty masterpiece of her, by respecting the flower of ignorance while I kept from her all she ought to know! I should preach to her the law of love, pure, natural love, which should go hand in hand with marriage: the social law. I should say to her: "Try to be happy in order to remain honest, for happiness is half of virtue. Since a romance is necessary in a woman's life, make your husband the hero."

BLANCHE. But I'm not at all romantic.

MARIE. At eighteen? You must have been severely frost-bitten! [*She makes BLANCHE sit down on a chair, left*]

BERNARD. [*To MARIE*] That's how it is in France, Mademoiselle! The young people affect materialism; they blush at being fanciful or romantic!

MARIE. So much the worse for them!

BERNARD. So much the worse, yes. The romance that is right, founded on reason, is the ideal which is founded on truth — you come to realise that as you grow older.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Alas!

BERNARD. [*To FOURCHAMBAULT*] What amuses me is the way young ladies seem indignant at fortune-hunters.

BLANCHE. But aren't they right?

BERNARD. Yes, but they go about it the wrong way. Now, the young ladies are really as interested as the men — that is evident. Marriage for money or marriage for pride, it is always marriage for a motive of self-interest. Fortune-hunters or title-hunters — what's the difference?

MARIE. [*To the right of BLANCHE, with one hand on the back of her chair*] If you really thought about this, I am sure your heart could not but agree.

BERNARD. [*To the left of BLANCHE, with one hand on the chair*] Why don't you think about it?

MARIE. If you don't insist on having a husband you love, you surely cannot insist on *his* loving *you*? Are you ready to accept a life without tenderness and affection? Can you bear the thought of intimacy with a stranger? Doesn't the bare idea revolt you?

BERNARD. How sweet it must be to live in peace and security under the protection of a master who makes himself your slave!

MARIE. And to protect him against the discouragements of life!

BERNARD. Give him children who will carry on your existence in their own?

MARIE. And from whom will arise a second love for you both!

BERNARD. Believe me, my dear Blanche, marriage is the basest of human institutions, when it is merely the union of two fortunes.

MARIE. And the greatest of divine institutions when it is the union of two souls.

MARIE'S eyes meet the glance of BERNARD. *They both look away, confused and silent.*

FOURCHAMBAULT. Take their advice, child! And take your old father's. — There is a young man here who loves you.

BLANCHE. [*Quickly rising*] Has he come back?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Yesterday. He told the whole story to Bernard this morning — between sobs!

BLANCHE. Poor boy!

FOURCHAMBAULT. *He* doesn't want your money! He is willing to marry you without a dowry, if your mother refuses to give you one.

BLANCHE. She needn't, then! That would be much better!

FOURCHAMBAULT. But we must at least have her consent.

BLANCHE. That will be hard to get, but M. Bernard can help us! [*To BERNARD*] You'll help us, won't you, to convert Mamma?

BERNARD. [*Affectionately*] If you are converted, that is all that will be necessary. I'll go now and tell my mother, she is very much interested. As to Mme. Fourchambault, she will doubtless, and on good grounds, feel that I have somewhat overstepped the bounds of simple partnership. Your father must discuss the matter with her.

BLANCHE. [*To her father*] Have you the courage?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Have I? Good Lord! When my daughter's happiness is at stake, no woman shall make me swerve a hair's breadth!

BERNARD. Good, then you will see to getting Mme. Fourchambault's consent?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Leave that to me!

BERNARD. I'll get back to work then. [*To MARIE*]
You'll have your answer ready to-morrow, then, Mademoiselle?

MARIE. Yes, Monsieur.

BERNARD *goes out*.

BLANCHE. Now — do you know what I'm going to do if Mamma refuses to consent? I'm going quietly to the altar—city-hall, that is — and after the mayor has made his pretty little sermon, I'm going to speak out in my clearest voice: No, no, no!

FOURCHAMBAULT. That's an ideal! Perhaps that's the best way out of the difficulty —

BLANCHE. Don't you think so? Then you won't have to face Mamma! [*To MARIE*] He's afraid already.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Little stupid, you!

BLANCHE. Not so stupid as you think. — Do you want us to stay with you and support you?

FOURCHAMBAULT. Oh, not at all; you would only be in the way. The conference may be a bit stormy — children should be out of the way on such occasions. There's your mother now! Run off.

BLANCHE. Very well, Papa. [*They go out*]

FOURCHAMBAULT. I'd give a good deal to be an hour older. — But, courage! — Here she is — The devil! She seems to be in a bad humour.

Enter MME. FOURCHAMBAULT, in a rage, with a letter in her hand.

FOURCHAMBAULT. What's the matter, dear?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Handing him the letter*] Read!

FOURCHAMBAULT. From the Prefect?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. A messenger just brought it. — Read it!

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Reading*] "Madame, I have braved public opinion so long as I believed that it was based only on lies. It was too painful to believe that you would tolerate a liaison under your own roof, and of which your son was a party.

After your confidences of last night, you will realise —" What confidences?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. How do I know? Go on.

FOURCHAMBAULT. [*Reading*] "You will realise that a union between our families has become impossible." — Then it's broken off?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. The good-for-nothing!

FOURCHAMBAULT. Then Blanche is definitely thrown over?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Definitely.

FOURCHAMBAULT. And will be very hard to marry off!

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. There is only one further possibility: M. Chauvet.

FOURCHAMBAULT. Chauvet?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Of course: Chauvet! He landed only yesterday; my maid saw him this morning. Run now at once and tell M. Bernard that I consent to give my daughter to his protégé.

FOURCHAMBAULT. You? You? What about me?

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Have you changed your mind?

FOURCHAMBAULT. No, but —

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. Then let's have no objections. There's not a minute to lose: I want the news of this engagement to be made public the moment people hear of the breaking-off of the other — understand? We'll think about Mlle. Letellier afterward.

FOURCHAMBAULT. She's been offered a situation in England.

MME. FOURCHAMBAULT. That's good! Let her accept, the sooner the better. — Now, run off to M. Bernard. I'll prepare Blanche for her required change of attitude. [*As she is about to go out, left*] Run! [*Aside, as she goes out*] Run, weathercock!

FOURCHAMBAULT. That wasn't very hard! — When you're dealing with women, you have merely to know how to handle them!

CURTAIN

ACT V

SCENE: — *Same as in Act II.* MME. BERNARD *is sitting on a sofa, left, knitting a child's stocking.* BERNARD *enters at back a moment later.*

BERNARD. [*Throwing his hat down with impatience*] Curse it!

MME. BERNARD. What's the matter?

BERNARD. Oh — it was only to be expected: Mlle. Letellier is in a bad situation.

MME. BERNARD. Bad?

BERNARD. The whole town is talking about her. It seems that last night, at the reception at the Prefecture, the Rastiboulois' officially announced their breaking-off with the Fourchambaults, and managed to whisper it about that it was quite impossible to marry a young lady brought up in a home the morality of which was at least open to criticism — Where a brother lived openly with his mistress, and where a mother brazenly sanctioned the goings-on — under her very roof!

MME. BERNARD. [*Rising*] That's not possible! I can't believe it. You too seem a little too ready to —

BERNARD. But there is no room for doubt, I am sorry to say. That fool, Mme. Fourchambault, was led to give away no end of secrets to the Baron: she told him the whole story. And it's my fault! I should have got Mlle. Letellier away from that place sooner! I could see she was attracted by the little ape! I relied too much on her power of resistance, and I took too much for granted with mother and son — Well, the evil's been done!

MME. BERNARD. What is going to become of her?

BERNARD. She is going to England. Of course, she hesitated before the prospect of that exile — now she'll accept it willingly as a means of salvation. The scandal won't touch her when she's the other side of the Channel; it'll die a natural death when she leaves.

MME. BERNARD. He must have promised to marry her!

BERNARD. Yes, it's the tradition in that family!

MME. BERNARD. I am sure the father would have kept his promise if a loyal friend had only advised him, told him of his duties toward me.

BERNARD. Perhaps *he* would have!

MME. BERNARD. Wouldn't you bless such a friend? [*Approaching her son*] Wouldn't you have considered him a happy man who can have saved a poor girl who had been seduced?

BERNARD. Of course.

MME. BERNARD. Then, my boy, you be that friend for Marie and for your brother.

BERNARD. [*With a little laugh*] My brother! That's true, he is! — My brother! If you think a man like him would consent to marry her! Do you imagine his mother would let him marry a girl without a dowry!

MME. BERNARD. If that's the only objection —

BERNARD *looks in astonishment at his mother, then sits down, his eyes lowered. — A long silence.*

BERNARD. [*Taking his mother's hand*] I'll do it — do what you would have liked done in your own case.

MME. BERNARD. Thank you, dear boy.

A SERVANT. [*Announcing*] Mlle. Letellier.

BERNARD. [*Aside*] I wish I didn't have to meet her!

Enter MARIE, at the back. She bows to MME. BERNARD, who motions her to a chair. She then turns, surprised, to BERNARD, who bows formally to her.

MARIE. I have come to say good-bye to you, Madame. I have just reserved my passage on a steamer leaving for Ile de Bourbon.

MME. BERNARD. Then you are not going to England?

MARIE. [*Bitterly*] No, Madame, Sir John Sunter refuses to take me.

BERNARD. [*Aside*] Well, that was to be expected.

MME. BERNARD. And what do you intend to do there?

MARIE. Who knows? God is merciful.

BERNARD. [*Advancing*] When does the steamer leave?

MARIE. At high-tide this evening.

BERNARD. Wait for me here. [*He goes out*]

MME. BERNARD. You mustn't give up hope, my poor Marie. My son is going to make M. Léopold keep his promise.

MARIE. What promise?

MME. BERNARD. To marry you.

MARIE. But he never said a word of that! I'll give him credit for declaring that his intentions were perfectly dishonourable!

MME. BERNARD. And in spite of that, you are ——?

MARIE. His mistress? So they say.

MME. BERNARD. [*Rising*] But what do *you* say?

MARIE. [*Proudly*] Nothing! What is the good? Slander is not worth refuting! One must either crush it or suffer from it. But to defend oneself without sufficient proofs of innocence, ask for grace and not receive it, is the worst of humiliations. I shall hold my head high no matter what happens.

MME. BERNARD. I know well that fierce resignation! — That is the pride of innocence. [*She draws MARIE to her arms and holds her in her embrace*] I think I am the only being on earth who can put a stop to these stories. I must give you back the honour you have never really lost — as if you had! Léopold *will* marry you!

MARIE. Marry me? But, Madame, I don't love him.

MME. BERNARD. You are at least on very friendly terms with him. Now I don't propose a marriage of love, but a marriage of reason, or — rather — a marriage of rehabilitation.

MARIE. Yes, I see: that would bring honour, a great deal more perhaps — maybe everything! But then, will Léopold consent? He owes me nothing — and — I am poor.

MME. BERNARD. Not so poor as you imagine. To begin with, you have 40,000 francs.

MARIE. I must have 300,000 more.

MME. BERNARD. Wait a moment: you are going to receive an inheritance.

MARIE. I? From whom?

MME. BERNARD. [*Confused*] Or — a — donation — I don't exactly know. My son has just received word — he's gone to tell M. Léopold.

MARIE. [*With a sad smile*] A donation! — Here are a mother and son who love me as they would their own daughter. You have hearts of gold! You are so tender, so generous to me! May God give you all the happiness He has refused me!

Enter BERNARD.

MME. BERNARD. Back so soon? You haven't found him, then?

BERNARD. No, he left this morning, but I left a message for him, asking him to come here as soon as he returns. He was expected back any moment, I was told.

MARIE. I know, Monsieur Bernard, all you want to do for me. I am very grateful. You believe I am guilty, but if your plan succeeds, you will see that I am not unworthy of your fatherly interest.

BERNARD. Fatherly, yes. But you may be sure my plan will succeed. I promise.

MARIE. Heaven grant it!

BERNARD. [*Aside*] I'll pay!

MME. BERNARD. Someone's coming up-stairs.

MARIE. It's Léopold.

BERNARD. [*Aside*] She recognizes his step! — Well, if you will both leave me —?

MME. BERNARD. Come, Marie. [*They go out, left. The door at the back opens*]

A SERVANT. [*Announcing*] M. Léopold Fourchambault.

Enter LÉOPOLD.

LÉOPOLD. I returned just a moment after you left. I came at once, Monsieur.

BERNARD. Thank you. You are doubtless aware of what occurred last night at the Prefecture?

LÉOPOLD. It was on that account that I went out so early this morning. A friend of mine told me everything last night. I got up at sunrise — everything is now arranged. The gossips are now on our side.

BERNARD. Everything arranged?

LÉOPOLD. Oh, when something must be done, I waste no time. By six I was at Victor Chauvet's. There's a man for you! He wants to shoulder the responsibility for the whole affair, simply because he believes he ought to marry my sister. I told him three women were compromised, of whom two were no concern of his — but he made no objection. There's a brother-in-law after my own heart! If I owe all this to you, I want to thank you.

BERNARD. Well, then?

LÉOPOLD. By seven, Victor saw young Rastiboulois; by eight, the principals and seconds met; by ten we were on the field. I must give the little Baron credit for being equal to the occasion — would have made a very passable brother-in-law on that score! — By five minutes past ten, the Baron received a sword-thrust which will confine him to his bed for a good two weeks. By eleven, I was lunching with the seconds — friend Victor has a capital appetite! I'm going to invite myself often to dinner. By noon, we were back in Le Havre — compliments from friends — I return home, find your note, and — here I am. Have I wasted my morning?

BERNARD. And do you think everything is arranged now?

LÉOPOLD. [*Sitting on the sofa*] Wait till you see which way public opinion will go! Nothing like a sword-thrust at the proper time! The Rastiboulois, won't be able to live in the town! I'll wager that in a week, the Prefect will ask to be transferred. — It's very amusing.

BERNARD. [*Sitting on a chair near the sofa*] And what is to become of Mlle. Marie Letellier?

LÉOPOLD. Isn't she going to England?

BERNARD. No, Monsieur. The scandal in which she was involved has prevented her making a living. Sir John Sunter will not take her.

LÉOPOLD. The poor girl! This is too bad! What can be done?

BERNARD. Think.

LÉOPOLD. Could she be made to accept — very delicately —?

BERNARD. Money? She has lost her good name; that must be restored to her.

LÉOPOLD. But my dear Monsieur, I cannot restore what I have never taken.

BERNARD. I am not asking for confidences, Monsieur.

LÉOPOLD. It would be less indiscreet than to ask for what you have just asked. I take it that you want me to marry her.

BERNARD. That is about it.

LÉOPOLD. [*Rising*] Does your partnership include the treatment of such questions?

BERNARD. No, Monsieur, but I have a deep interest in Mlle. Letellier.

LÉOPOLD. • I am well aware of that — you can refuse her nothing.

BERNARD. I consider myself in a way her father.

LÉOPOLD. Then you're a judge of the assizes?

BERNARD. I don't understand.

LÉOPOLD. Never mind.

BERNARD. [*Rising*] Whether or not she is your mistress is no affair of mine. I do know however that her good name is lost through your fault; she is no longer able to make a living. She was your guest, under the protection of your family; you owe her reparation. Marriage is the only possible reparation you can make. — That is what I know.

LÉOPOLD. If you had done a little less navigating, Monsieur,

you would know that there sometimes arise certain situations for which no one is responsible — these situations are false in and by themselves. Teachers, companions, governesses [*A gesture from BERNARD*], it's all the same: they're all unfortunate girls, objects of suspicion merely because there happens to be a young man in the house.

BERNARD. [*Bitterly*] Yes, I know: work, which is man's glory, makes a *déclassée* of woman. The world is ever on its guard against a woman who wants to make an honest living. Her path is difficult, and all of society is waiting to see her make a false step —

LÉOPOLD. Well, she is certainly on a dangerous path!

BERNARD. [*Angrily*] For those who descend, not for those who ascend! *She* ascends! You should respect and help her, encourage her. But no! You despise her, and wait for her to fall! Help her to, even! When she falls, no one turns to give her a helping hand. That's your justice!

LÉOPOLD. It may not be just, but it simply is so. *I* haven't compromised Maïa: it's her situation.

BERNARD. [*Restraining himself*] Do you deny having made advances to her?

LÉOPOLD. Of course you are asking for no confidences?

BERNARD. Well, do you love her — yes or no?

LÉOPOLD. I love her — in a way.

BERNARD. Enough to marry her? Or will you wait until you find someone else, whom perhaps you won't love so well, but who will bring you 200,000 or 300,000 francs' dowry!

LÉOPOLD. [*Bowing*] I prefer 300,000.

BERNARD. Well, Mlle. Letellier has them.

LÉOPOLD. Where did they come from? If I'm not indiscreet?

BERNARD. I have told you that I consider myself in a way as her father.

LÉOPOLD. [*Ironically*] Rather young father! My compliments, Monsieur! Royal, quite in keeping with the ancient

monarchy! But we simple bourgeois have certain scruples and cannot accept such dowries.

BERNARD. [*Outraged*] You think so? No, you don't believe a word of it.

LÉOPOLD. In what capacity would you furnish Mlle. Letellier with a dowry?

BERNARD. Ha! Ha! You stick at that — your honour is involved? I recognize your blood! You *are* the grandson of your grandfather!

LÉOPOLD. I flatter myself!

BERNARD. Don't mention it, Monsieur.

LÉOPOLD. You mean —?

BERNARD. That your grandfather was a blackguardly slanderer.

LÉOPOLD. Repeat that!

BERNARD. The lowest of blackguards! — [LÉOPOLD *throws his glove in BERNARD'S face*; BERNARD *utters a cry, is about to throw himself on LÉOPOLD, when he stops himself, wringing his hands*] It is lucky for you that you are my brother!

LÉOPOLD. Your brother! Are you — can —? You are the son of the piano-teacher? Well, that needn't prevent our fighting. I know the story, and I am able to certify that you haven't a drop of our blood in your veins.

BERNARD. There, that is your grandfather's crime! You're perpetuating it! During the past three days, I have been able to give the lie to the miserable slanders circulated by your grandfather: according to my mother's wishes, I have saved your father from bankruptcy — your father and my father!

LÉOPOLD. [*In astonishment*] According to your mother's wishes —?

BERNARD. Yes, Monsieur, she still has some respect for the honour of the family which took so little care of hers. — I assumed complete charge of you all when you were in trouble, I have now restored your house to order: material and moral; I have saved your sister, who is my sister, from a fearful marriage — all according to the wishes of my mother. And now I have

just been struck in the face by you, and I have not struck back, so sure am I that we are both of the same flesh and blood. Now what do you say?

LÉOPOLD. That your mother is the noblest of women — that it is true the same blood flows in our veins — that in striking you I struck myself. — Forgive me, brother!

BERNARD. [*Pointing to his cheek*] Efface it. [LÉOPOLD throws himself into BERNARD'S arms] Now are you willing for me to give Marie her dowry?

LÉOPOLD. Yes, brother. — Oh, what a small imitation I seem beside you! But you will make me worthy of you, educate, encourage me — There's some good in me, you'll see —

BERNARD. Now I am sure of it. — Let us treat one another as brothers in private, but before the world we must appear only as friends. Don't say a word of what you have just found out, you understand? Even to your father!

LÉOPOLD. Shall he never know, then?

BERNARD. Never. You will realize how important silence is when you know that I have renounced marriage and family life, everything that I love, to keep my secret — my mother's secret, rather.

LÉOPOLD. [*Warmly grasping his hand*] I understand. Rely on me.

SERVANT. [*Announcing*] Mlle. Blanche Fourchambault.

LÉOPOLD. [*Aside to BERNARD*] My sister! — Our sister!

BERNARD. [*Aside to LÉOPOLD*] Sh! [*To the SERVANT*] Ask my mother and Mlle. Letellier to come in. [*The SERVANT goes out, left*]

Enter BLANCHE, at the back, just as BERNARD is speaking.

LÉOPOLD. [*Assuming an air of severity*] You hardly expected to see me here, did you, Mademoiselle?

BLANCHE. On the contrary: I have come to see you. I want to say something while M. Bernard is present; he will certainly support me.

LÉOPOLD. Go on.

BLANCHE. Well, I think that as you have compromised Maïa it is your duty to marry her.

LÉOPOLD. Do you believe that?

BLANCHE. So does Papa.

LÉOPOLD. And Mamma?

BLANCHE. Not yet, but we'll bring her around, if M. Bernard will help us.

LÉOPOLD. He has helped us so well that there is no longer any objection.

BLANCHE. Monsieur Bernard, you are our Providence.

LÉOPOLD. Then kiss him.

BLANCHE. [*Embracing BERNARD impetuously*] With all my heart!

BERNARD. [*Aside to LÉOPOLD, grasping his hand*] Thank you!

Enter MARIE and MME. BERNARD.

BLANCHE. How glad I am, Maïa — sister!

MARIE. You have succeeded, then, Monsieur Bernard?

BERNARD. I have the honour to ask for your hand on behalf of my friend Léopold.

MARIE. Heaven be praised! I was afraid you might fail! Well, I refuse.

LÉOPOLD. What?

BLANCHE. Oh!

MARIE. I refuse.

MME. BERNARD. What?

MARIE. I refuse.

BERNARD. But just now you seemed to accept it with gratitude!

MARIE. Yes, because it constituted the only possible justification for me: my refusal. If I don't love Monsieur enough to marry him, who will believe I once loved him enough to become his mistress?

MME. BERNARD. No one, eh, Bernard?

BERNARD. No one!

MARIE. And now, good-bye. Defend me, after I am gone. Good-bye, Madame — I shall never forget your goodness; you

have been like a mother to me. — Good-bye, Léopold: don't look that way, now! I have more affection for you than you had for me. Let's be good friends in separating. Good-bye, dear little Blanche. You have called me sister; I shan't forget that. — Good-bye, M. Bernard —

BERNARD. Good-bye, Mademoiselle.

BLANCHE. [*Sobbing*] I don't want you to leave. Why don't you marry my brother, since you like him?

LÉOPOLD. Because she loves someone else!

MARIE. Léopold!

BLANCHE. Whom?

LÉOPOLD. A blind man, who chooses not to see, a deaf man, who will not hear, a timid man who thinks he is not young or handsome enough to be loved, an idiot who tries to force her into the arms of another, who offers to give her a dowry —

MARIE. Léopold. — It's not true, M. Bernard!

BERNARD. [*Falling into a chair, his face in his hands*] I know it only too well, Mademoiselle!

MME. BERNARD. [*Pointing to him — To MARIE*] Marie!

MARIE. [*To BERNARD*] What if — if it were true? What if — as I am about to leave — my heart —? All my friendship, affection, gratitude — can it be that they were really — another feeling, a different sentiment? Here — my hand —!

BERNARD. [*Confusedly*] Mademoiselle — Marie — [*Aside to his mother*] No, it can't be!

MME. BERNARD. [*To her son*] She has suffered enough to understand —

BERNARD. [*Aside to his mother*] That's true!

MME. BERNARD. Try!

BERNARD. [*Taking MARIE'S hands in his own*] Marie!

BLANCHE. [*To LÉOPOLD*] Then she won't be our sister-in-law?

LÉOPOLD. There's not much changed! Hasn't Bernard been more than a brother to us?

BLANCHE. That's so.

LÉOPOLD. [*Kissing MME. BERNARD'S hand*] Madame, I too love you!

CURTAIN

THE POST-SCRIPT

[LE POST-SCRIPTUM]

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

PERSONS REPRESENTED

M. DE LANCY

MME. DE VERLIÈRE

A SERVANT

SCENE: — *Paris.*

TIME: — *The present.*

THE POST-SCRIPT

SCENE: — *An elegantly furnished room. There are two entrances at the back; at the right, a fireplace; centre, a table. As the curtain rises, MME. DE VERLIÈRE is discovered wearing a loose gown, seated by the fire-place, cutting the leaves of a book. M. DE LANCY enters a moment later, right.*

LANCY. [*At the threshold*] I beg your pardon, neighbour, it's I. Please don't scold your maid — she kept telling me you were at home to no one. But I told her that a landlord *was* no one: that argument succeeded. Now, must I go?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. It's very lucky that it is you!

LANCY. Is the book so very interesting?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I don't know, I'm only cutting it. Now you are here, my dear Lancy, you may wait with me. That's what I am doing.

LANCY. [*Noticing that her hair is powdered*] Who? Oh, the Carnival?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Heavens, no! I shouldn't think of being powdered so early for the ball.

LANCY. What then?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. What is the mystery, you think? I can't keep secrets from you: well, I've had an Athenian Water hair-wash this morning, and I use the powder to dry my hair. Now are you satisfied? By the way, thank you for your present. You are the king of hunters and a model proprietor.

LANCY. You are possibly right as to the first compliment, but the second —

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I'm already afraid; are you thinking of raising my rent?

LANCY. Worse: I am going to give you notice.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Are you joking?

LANCY. All my courage as a gentleman and a man of the world would be insufficient to tell you; therefore I must speak as a business man.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Could the business man not wait until to-morrow?

LANCY. Impossible. According to our contract, six months' notice is required. Now, the fatal term expires to-day; to-morrow you enter into the next. I should be very much put out —

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. You are a frank hunter.

LANCY. Woodsman, if you like!

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. You go straight to the point.

LANCY. Possibly.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. "Possibly" is good! May I know the reason for this — ejection? You must have a reason, I imagine?

LANCY. And an excellent one. Have you time to listen to me?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I might have. And I confess I'd like to find a good excuse for you, for I'd be sorry to lose you.

LANCY. I warn you, it's quite a story.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Take as much time as you like — if you can't finish, you may continue to-morrow.

LANCY. [*Sitting down by the table*] I'll begin: left an orphan at the age of twenty-four —

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. The story of your life? Then why pass over the years of your childhood?

LANCY. Well, if you insist, I'll start from the beginning, the way Tristram Shandy does, especially as there is a clock connected with my birth — as with his.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Good.

LANCY. Don't be afraid. My mother often told me that she had a large clock in her room — with a gong — and the moment I was born it joyously struck noon. A lucky portent. So that from birth I have been of a happy and humorous dis-

position, which age has not yet been able to modify. I have an inexhaustible fund of energy — bad for melancholy.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. But excellent for egotism. Take care!

LANCY. Don't believe that. The only good people are the healthy ones. You certainly should know something about it, you who cared for your late husband.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. That's true.

LANCY. Well, at the age of twenty-four I was the possessor of a good-sized fortune; I had a good name —

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. And you at once hastened to reduce the former and —

LANCY. Tarnish the latter? Oh, no. My time was too much taken up with hunting to allow me to do anything else. I've always detested the sight of a card, and, let me tell you —

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Never mind the details.

LANCY. Just sufficient to make my point. I have spent my life up to now in quest of the ideal woman. I have often been mistaken. In society, out of society, I have carried my fruitless search. Where, where was the heart that would give itself freely, without afterthought — I don't bore you?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Oh, no.

LANCY. Well, I'll be brief. Finally I had passed the age when a man marries with his eyes shut, and I could look forward only to a marriage of reason. It's extremely difficult, you know, to see any reason why I should marry! But at last I think I have found the woman.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I'm very glad to hear it.

LANCY. One moment! I have not yet been accepted.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. You will be. I don't see how it can be helped: you are charming, in spite of your infamous methods — but we are losing sight of what you first said to me.

LANCY. On the contrary, I am coming to that. As a bachelor, I could be quite content with my one floor, but the moment I rise to the position of a married man, I must also rise to the next floor.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I see. You wish to put Madame de Lancy in my apartment?

LANCY. [*Rising*] That's it.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I forgive you, because your motive is good. Though it is inconvenient to move. I'm a creature of habit, and I've become used to my place here.

LANCY. [*Leaning on the back of MME. DE VERLIÈRE'S chair*] You won't have to do that: stay!

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. But what about Madame de Lancy?

LANCY. She can't possibly object, so long as ——

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. So long as ——?

LANCY. You change your name.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. What do you mean?

LANCY. By ceasing to be known as Madame de Verlière, and taking the name of Madame ——

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. De Lancy? Heaven forgive me, but I think you are proposing?

LANCY. To tell the truth, I think I am!

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Rising*] How long it takes you to come to the point!

LANCY. And you were blaming me not long ago for being so outspoken.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Standing by the fireplace*] My fault. So then, I am to be your partner in a marriage of reason? Why, you're not at all polite.

LANCY. Pardon me, we must get down to definitions. What the world calls a marriage of reason, is a marriage in which neither the heart nor the eyes are consulted: where one marries a woman one wouldn't ordinarily care to have (~~as a mistress~~), where one takes her forever — that I call not a marriage of reason, but a madman's marriage.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Very well; your statement needed some modification. You are a curious man.

LANCY. In what way?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. In every way — the way you pay court to me.

LANCY. How do you know? I've never paid court to you.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. There's your first proof of originality. The way you have just asked me to marry you — why, I'd have to look hard to see in you a sighing swain.

LANCY. Sighing is not in my character. If you give me a good reason why I should sigh, I shall be glad to do so, as well as anyone.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. But are you sure you love me?

LANCY. As sure as that I breathe and live.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I had no idea of your love.

LANCY. Nor I. If anyone had told me of it a month ago, I should have been very much surprised.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. How did you finally know? I'm surely not a coquette?

LANCY. No, you are not. Well, this fireplace is the cause of it all.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Really?

LANCY. At first, of course, I knew you only by sight, but I was in danger of never really knowing you at all, for your mourning would have kept me away from you always if that good fireplace hadn't taken to smoking — and opened your door to me.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. And it still smokes, when the east wind blows.

LANCY. I'll make a note of it. — From that day on, I dreamed of nothing but further repairs — a strange dream for a landlord. That should have warned me. So, one thing led to another, and I found myself here in your apartment; I admired the simplicity in which you lived while you were mourning your husband. I soon began to feel the effect of your charming personality. ~~X~~ When and how did that friendship change to a more powerful sentiment? I cannot say. But, consider that I had resolved to end my bachelorhood soon, and that only last week I heard of a very advantageous union into which I might enter. Well, *that* particular one inspired me with disgust, and

I somehow felt that my heart belonged entirely to you. During the past week I have been worrying and trying to make up my mind to ask you to marry me — I behaved like a much younger and less-experienced man. Now, it's over with, and I tell you, I am not sorry.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Going up-stage behind the table*] My poor friend, I really like you; you are the most gallant man I know.

LANCY. That's a bad beginning.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I too was deceived as to the appearance of our "friendship," and I am not conscious that I have in any way encouraged —

LANCY. I displease you — I rather suspected it! I should have said nothing at all. Well, imagine I haven't spoken, and allow me my corner here by the fireplace.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. You will be welcome as long you wish to come.

LANCY. That will be always.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Even if I marry again?

LANCY. Oh, no. You're not thinking of that, are you?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. What if I did?

LANCY. Don't say that!

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. You must know of it some day.

LANCY. Really, are you —? No, no, that's out of the question. I've never seen anyone here who could possibly be thought of as —

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Here, no, but was I not telling you that I expected someone to-day?

LANCY. I was prepared for everything but that.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Don't look so desperate. All of my heart that remains for me to dispose of, you have. I should not object to accepting your offer if I loved no one else. What better can I say?

LANCY. What consolation is that? Only for my wounded pride. *It* needs none. I should prefer to have you displeased with me, and have you care for no one at all. You might at

least have kept that secret from me! If you think you are consoling me ——

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. No, only I think I can cure you. In a matter of this sort, the best way is to have it over with as soon as possible.

LANCY. Cure me? Then you're telling me doctors' lies? I'm not so simple as all that. I should have suspected that you were waiting for someone — the way your hair was fixed ——

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. But, I tell you ——

LANCY. Some absent beloved one? And you chose precisely the day of his arrival to put that flour in your hair ——

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Now allow me to tell you a little story. [*She seats herself to the right of the table.*]

LANCY. [*Sitting at the opposite side*] Two if you like. You may well be proud that you have quite alarmed me. }

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Do you know Madame de Valincourt?

LANCY. Her husband is one of my best friends.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Three years after she was married she contracted typhoid fever, as a result of which her hair turned white.

LANCY. Yes?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Her husband adored her. So long as she was in danger, it was a question of whether he would survive her. She did recover, as if by a miracle ——

LANCY. Her hair turned white ——

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Her hair turned white, and ever since, her husband spends his evenings at the club. What do you say to that?

LANCY. Well ——

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Rising*] Well? Do you excuse him?

LANCY. [*Laughing*] To a certain extent. A fine young fellow adores a brunette — she suddenly becomes a pepper-and-salt Eurydice. She's another woman.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*At the fireplace*] You are all the

same! Let a woman be good, loyal, sincere — it makes no difference: it is the tint of her hair or the curve of her neck that means everything. Become a coquette, a flirt, be as selfish as you like, his love will remain; but be careful of the first gray hair, the first line — good-by, happiness! “I’m very very sorry” he will say. And I pitied you not long ago!

LANCY. Please — what have I to do with all this?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Returning to the table*] And you make excuses for Valincourt — you would even follow his example, if the opportunity arose. You might at least have the courage of your convictions.

LANCY. Let us try to be reasonable: are you attacking me or Valincourt?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. You, and him, and your whole sex. I am attacking that disgusting way your love places us on a par with animals — somewhere between hounds and race-horses. Is that clear? [*She returns to the chair where she was first sitting, near the fireplace*]

LANCY. [*Rising*] Very clear. Every woman who prides herself on her delicacy of feeling, objects to being loved for her beauty. She wants to be loved only for her soul.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Ridiculous, isn’t it?

LANCY. I don’t say that, but you see man is a brutal creature, who loves only with his eyes.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. That is why I blame him.

LANCY. Unfortunately, that is a natural law to which both sexes are subject, yours and mine, in spite of all argument to the contrary.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. How infamous!

LANCY. Now, Madame, tell me frankly: if you loved some one, and he came to you one day maimed and crippled, wouldn’t the deformity throw a little cold water over the warmth of your affection?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. You know very little about women, my friend! When we love a man, we think only of his intelligence and his heart. We scarcely know if he is light or dark.

If such a case as you mention occurred, we should be doubly tender and affectionate — to console and help him.

LANCY. For a week.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. For a life-time.

LANCY. I should like to see you put to that test.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. If I were only sure that he would not succumb to the test I am preparing for him!

LANCY. Who?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. The man I am expecting.

LANCY. You still insist that someone *is* coming?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Rising*] That is the reason why I am so — well, this flour! I'm going to tell him that my hair has turned white during this absence, and that I must now powder my hair to conceal the defect — the — what did you call it? Pepper —?

LANCY. And salt.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. And salt. — And if I see the least sign of hesitation in his eyes, then everything is at an end. [*She goes toward the right*]

LANCY. Are you sure of that?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I am positive.

LANCY. Then, will you allow me some hope?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. No, I should then retire from the world and bury myself at my estate: Verlière.

LANCY. [*Smiling*] Have you no place for a friend at Verlière?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Please don't joke about it. When I think of this trick I am going to play —

LANCY. Then why play it?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Ah!

LANCY. But will you at least allow me to know the result?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Yes.

Enter a SERVANT.

SERVANT. [*Appearing at the left*] Madame, Monsieur de Mauléon is here.

LANCY. [*Aside*] Monsieur de Mauléon?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Good. I'll be there directly.

The SERVANT goes out.

LANCY. [*Distantly*] It's he? Why didn't you tell me at first? I should have gone without saying a word.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Why so? Do you know him?

LANCY. [*Taking his hat, which lies on the table*] Slightly. I only know that he is a consul, that he has been in India during the past two years.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Well?

LANCY. You are a widow — pardon me. [*He goes towards door at the right*]

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Monsieur de Lancy! [*He stops*] I don't wish you to misunderstand about this gentleman. I should like to deserve your esteem.

LANCY. You are too good, Madame. — Monsieur is waiting.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. One moment: it was I who asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs to have Monsieur de Mauléon sent away.

LANCY. Well, you are right in not loving me: I don't deserve it. I have offended you.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Yes, but you didn't displease me. You at least were original and you now don't offer to do the conventional thing. That shows that my reputation means something to you.

LANCY. [*Going toward her*] Your happiness, too, take my word for it.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I believe it.

LANCY. Then may I ask a simple question? Do you know that a short time after his installation, Monsieur de Mauléon made love to the daughter of a rich merchant?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I know it. What then?

LANCY. If you know — well, that is all.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I was not free when I knew him.

Why should I ask him to sacrifice his life for a hopeless love? He has no money; marriage is part of his career, and I have no doubt that that marriage he tried to contract would have taken place had he not been so heart-sick, and consequently so careless in his love-making.

LANCY. You are so indulgent that I find it hard to explain you.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. You are so severe that I can explain you only too easily.

LANCY. I must admit that I am partial. I would give a great deal to be your father or your uncle for five minutes!

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. But you are not.

LANCY. So I remain silent. Good-bye, Madame, I wish you all happiness.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. And I wish you to speak. Why do you behave this way about a man whom you scarcely know?

LANCY. Scarcely — but what I do know of him is characteristic. I acted as second to an adversary of his, and let me tell you that *we* were not the first to cry "Stop!"

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Were you Monsieur de Saint-Jean's second?

LANCY. Then you know about the affair?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Everything. Monsieur de Mauléon was altogether in the wrong; he wouldn't admit it, but it was I alone who made him offer an excuse. Nor was that the only mark of affection he gave me. I felt so deeply about it, that it became necessary to send him away. You are rather unfortunate in your method of attack, my poor Lancy — but you are right: Monsieur is waiting! Good-bye. [*She goes out*]

LANCY. She loves him. [*A pause*] Doubtless she will tell him of her trick the moment she has tried it. Why should I wait here? For the wedding invitation? [*He sits down by the fireplace. Another pause*] Hope? [*He rises*] Go away? I can't stay down-stairs, while they are having their honeymoon up here! No, my woods — the solitude of the country —

After a few moments, during which LANCY is plunged in meditation, enter MME. DE VERLIÈRE. She enters slowly, not seeing LANCY, who is at the left, and throws a visiting card on the table. Then she sits in her chair by the fireplace.

LANCY. [*Aside*] Ah! She seems so thoughtful! [*He coughs*]

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Turning around*] It's you!

LANCY. Back so soon? Then, did Monsieur de Mauléon

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Preoccupied*] Oh no, he was perfect. Not a moment's hesitation. He even thought that white hair was more becoming to me.

LANCY. And is that why he left so soon?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I asked him to leave me to myself for a little while. He is coming again this evening for tea. After this strenuous morning, I must pull myself together. I'm so glad to find you here now.

LANCY. May I be drawn and quartered if I know why I am here! Good-by, Madame.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I don't want you to go — not in the least.

LANCY. Do you want me to be present at your triumph?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. My triumph? Ah, yes, I ought to be the happiest of women — but I am almost sad.

LANCY. Great joy, they say, is nearly as trying as great sorrow.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. That isn't it, it is — all your fault.

LANCY. Mine?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. What you have said about Monsieur de Mauléon is troubling me a great deal.

LANCY. I am more troubled than you, Madame. When you left the room, I began looking into my conscience, and to blame myself for saying the things I did.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Really? Then restore my faith; you will be doing me a great service. Sit down. [LANCY

sits on a chair at the opposite side of the fireplace, his back half-turned to the audience] I think too much of you to allow myself to think well of a man who has not your good opinion.

LANCY. [*Resigned*] I have no reason to refuse my esteem for Monsieur de Mauléon.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Now I can breathe again. And that love-affair in India —?

LANCY. You said it yourself; could he —?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Never mind what I said — what do you think? Only tell me that you would have behaved as Monsieur de Mauléon did; that will satisfy me.

LANCY. I would have acted as Monsieur de Mauléon did.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. At the end of three months?

LANCY. Time has nothing to do with it.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Pardon me: either Monsieur de Mauléon forgot me too soon, which would be most ungallant —

LANCY. His return proves that he is not that.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Or, what was still less gallant, he was offering a heart which did not belong to him.

LANCY. You should not blame him for that! At any rate, he lost his courage at the last moment, because the marriage never took place.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. But did *he* prevent it?

LANCY. Oh —

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Laughing*] It was his fault, wasn't it?

LANCY. Oh, that is just the point I want to clear up — I must do him justice in this matter.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Yet his duel lessened him in your eyes?

LANCY. You see, I did not know he was acting on your orders. Now I agree entirely with you.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*A little put out*] I am delighted. So, my dear friend, if I ordered you to make excuses under similar circumstances, would you do it?

LANCY. Certainly.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Would you even put yourself in a position to receive orders from me? Would you, for instance, tell me beforehand that you were going to fight a duel?

LANCY. Please, Madame, I must be going!

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. No, no, answer me — please.

LANCY. [*Embarrassed*] Monsieur de Mauléon is not very careful what he tells, I must admit. Possibly he liked the idea of appearing in a dangerous position before you. That's no crime, of course.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. But he must have known what I would do?

LANCY. [*Carefully*] He was making the greatest sacrifice a man can make for a woman.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Do you think so?

LANCY. And just now you have put him to a conclusive proof.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Conclusive? You think so?

LANCY. Undoubtedly.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. You should keep to your opinions: you are a perfect weathercock.

LANCY. How do you make that out?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Tell me, do you believe that men love in a vastly different way from women?

LANCY. Oh, you know I am a brute.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Rising*] So are all men — more or less. So that, if they have only one way of loving, and if Monsieur de Mauléon does not love me that way, then he does not love me at all. You should at least try to be logical.

LANCY. How quickly you argue!

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Looking at herself in the mirror*] Then isn't it extraordinary, his complete indifference to my — what shall I say?

LANCY. Your beauty.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Yes. If I possess anything that is worth looking at, it is my hair. I think he hardly noticed it.

LANCY. [*Smiling*] He loves your soul.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Don't make fun! — And then, if he doesn't really love, just see what I must think?

LANCY. What?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Reseating herself opposite LANCY*] You don't seem to want to understand anything to-day! Didn't I tell you he was without a fortune?

LANCY. You are blaming him for it.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Oh, I don't know what I think! I'm so nervous! My dear Lancy, you were wishing not long ago you were a relative. Imagine that you are, and advise me. Please!

LANCY. I should be far too prejudiced.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. No. You are the incarnation of loyalty. I will obey you blindly.

LANCY. I advise you to marry me.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I didn't ask you that.

LANCY. But that is all I can say.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Tell me truly, do you think he loves me?

LANCY. I love you too deeply to doubt it.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Rises impatiently, goes across to the table, then returns quickly to LANCY*] Well, if he loves me, so much the worse for him; I refuse to marry him. I am sorry to have to disagree with you —

LANCY. [*Rising*] Do you think you are disagreeing with me? I am the happiest of men.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. You are entirely wrong, my poor Lancy, for I refuse to marry you too. I am not so tired of my widowhood as that. If you wish to remain my friend, very well, if not —

LANCY. I do. But, tell me, if I had nothing to do with this sudden change of mind, what did Mauléon have to do with it?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I have told you everything.

LANCY. Everything? Is there no *post-script*? Women always have them.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Not the faintest shadow of one.

[*She sits down at the left of the table*] Now, what must I do? I am not consulting you — you are perfectly horrid to-day.

LANCY. A woman always has the right to take back her word.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I have never given mine.

LANCY. Not just a few minutes ago?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. No. I don't know what instinctive prudence prevented me, though!

LANCY. [*Standing at the opposite side of the table*] Nothing simpler: he is coming to tea this evening and then —

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I wish he wouldn't.

LANCY. Then write to him.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. I've written to him too often.

LANCY. He has letters from you?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Not many, and they are not in the least compromising.

LANCY. Return his, and he will return yours.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Looking into the table drawer*] Here are his.

LANCY. Where does he live?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. He left his card — [*She points to the card on the table*]

LANCY. [*Takes the card, goes toward the door, then retraces his steps*] When shall I see you again?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. Will you come to tea?

LANCY. [*Bowing*] With pleasure.

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. [*Still looking through the drawer*] Oh, I forgot this little case. Take it with the letters.

LANCY. [*Taking the case*] A picture?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. No — a lock of hair he sent me. He won't be sorry to have it.

LANCY. Hasn't he any now?

MME. DE VERLIÈRE. He's as bald as the inside of your hand!

LANCY. [*Aside*] The post-script! [*He goes out*]

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